NATION

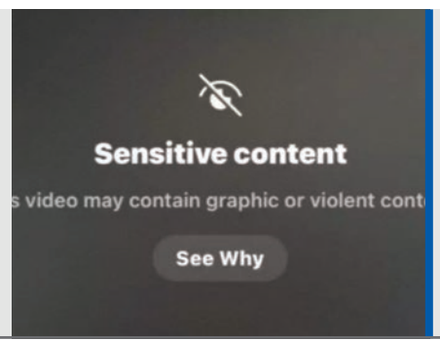
MP govt braces for trial burning of Carbide waste as SC clears hurdle

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Instagram 'error' floods feed with violent reels

≫ Page: 7 ≪



SPORTS

Aditya leads Kerala against Vidarbha

≫ Page: 8 ≪

www.twitter.com/EnglishSalar
www.facebook.com/EnglishSalar
www.instagram.com/dailysalarenglish
youtube.com/@dailysalardigital

SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in www.magzter.com 28 FEBRUARY 2025 | FRIDAY | BENGALURU | 29 SHABAN, 1446 AH Vol 4 | Issue No 59 | Pages: 8

Human remains found in HD Kote septic pit

MYSURU, 27 FEB

In a shocking discovery, skeletal remains of a man were unearthed in a septic pit in Jompanahalli Chinnappapalya, HD Kote taluk, while workers were repairing the pit on Thursday. The pit belongs to local resident Dasprakash, who has been missing for seven months. Labourers uncovered the remains, including a human skull, after the structure collapsed as they attempted repairs. Subsequent investigations were conducted by DySP Gopal Krishna and Circle Inspector Shabeer Huseein, who visited the scene, collected the remains, and dispatched them to forensic laboratories in Bengaluru. DySP Gopalakrishna confirmed that a missing person report for Dasprakash had been filed at HD Kote rural police station. Authorities are exploring all angles, with foul play suspected in the case. *—Salar News*

HC fines Amazon ₹340 cr over trademark case

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The Delhi High Court has mandated that Amazon compensate Lifestyle Equities with $39 million (approximately Rs 340 crore) for infringing the Beverly Hills Polo Club trademark. Justice Prathiba M Singh's ruling follows a 2020 lawsuit filed by Lifestyle Equities, which accused Amazon Technologies of selling products bearing a deceptive mark. An interim injunction was initially granted in October 2020, preventing Amazon from using the disputed mark, which was later made permanent due to Amazon's failure to appear in court. Cloudtail India, involved in the case, admitted to using the infringing mark between 2015 and July 2020, generating revenues of Rs 23,92,420. While the court awarded Cloudtail Rs 4,78,484 in damages, it said Lifestyle Equities could pursue further compensation from Amazon. *—Agencies*

After Stalin, CM trains guns on Shah over delimitation

CM called for unity saying South will lose seats to North

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday said Union Home Minister Amit Shah's claim that southern states will not be disadvantaged in the delimitation process is not "trustworthy". He added that Shah's statement appears to be aimed at creating confusion among the southern states.

His remarks came a day after Shah assured the southern states that they would not lose a 'single Parliamentary seat' due to delimitation.

Siddaramaiah said that if the Centre genuinely wishes to ensure fairness for the southern states, Shah must clarify whether delimitation will be based on the latest population ratio or the current number of Lok Sabha seats.

"It is evident that if delimitation is carried out based on the latest population ratio, it will be a severe injustice to the southern states. To prevent such unfairness, previous delimitation exercises were conducted using the 1971 census as the basis," he stated.

According to him, over the past 50 years, southern states have controlled population growth while progressing in terms of development. Meanwhile, northern states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh have failed to regulate population growth and continue to lag in development.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who was confined to a wheelchair due to knee pain, has now begun walking with the support of a cane *PHOTO: SALAR*

> **It is evident that if delimitation is carried out based on the latest population ratio, it will be a severe injustice to the southern states. To prevent such unfairness, previous delimitation exercises were conducted using the 1971 census as the basis**
> -Siddaramaiah, Chief Minister

Citing several studies conducted on the impact of delimitation, he said if delimitation is based solely on the latest census (2021 or 2031), the number of Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka is to decrease from 28 to 26. Similarly, Andhra Pradesh's seats would drop from 42 to 34, Kerala's from 20 to 12, and Tamil Nadu's from 39 to 31.

"The number of Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh would increase from 80 to 91, Bihar's from 40 to 50, and Madhya Pradesh's from 29 to 33. If this is not injustice, what is?" he wondered.

"However, looking at the extraordinary enthusiasm shown by Narendra Modi-led government for delimitation, it appears that the real intent is to punish the people of the southern states for resisting his party's dominance," he alleged.

Siddaramaiah highlighted that during the Karnataka Assembly election campaign, BJP President JP Nadda had warned that if the people of Karnataka did not support the BJP, the state would not receive Narendra Modi's blessings. Noting the situation, he urged Kannadigas to set aside differences of caste, religion, and political ideology and unite with a single voice against the "injustice" being "inflicted upon the state" by the union government. *—PTI*

TO COME UP IN PARL

PHOTO: PTI

Cabinet clears 14 Waqf Bill changes

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The Waqf Bill is likely to come up before Parliament during the second half of the Budget Session after the Union Cabinet approved the amendments proposed by the joint committee of Parliament, sources said.

During its meeting on 19 February, the Cabinet is learnt to have given its nod to the 14 amendments proposed by the panel examining the Bill, they said.

The report of the panel, headed by BJP MP Jagdambika Pal, was tabled in Parliament on 13 February amid uproar and a walkout by Opposition.

The Bill aims to streamline the registration of Waqf properties, besides preventing their misuse.

With the Cabinet nod, the Bill is likely to come up before Parliament during the second part of the session -- to be held from 10 March to 4 April.

Several top BJP leaders have claimed that the Bill was likely to be passed during this session itself.

The 31-member panel on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, had suggested several amendments to the proposed legislation even as the Opposition disagreed with the report and submitted their dissent notes.

The panel's 655-page report was submitted to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on 30 January.

The joint committee of Parliament had adopted the report that contained changes suggested by members from the ruling BJP by a majority vote of 15-11. The move prompted the Opposition to dub the exercise an attempt to destroy Waqf boards. *—PTI*

WHAT ARE KEY CHANGES TO THE BILL?

1. Two women will be included in State and Central Waqf Boards
2. The state Waqf Boards will now include one member from Muslim OBC community
3. Governments may establish separate Waqf Boards for Aghakhanis and Bohras
4. In Waqf Alal Aulad (family waqfs), women's inheritance rights will be safeguarded.

SC upholds GST, custom officials' arrest powers

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The Supreme Court of India has affirmed the constitutional validity of arrest powers granted to customs and goods and services tax (GST) authorities under amended laws. A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna, Justices M M Sundresh, and Bela M Trivedi noted that in certain cases, applications for pre-arrest bail could be considered even before an FIR, provided there is a clear basis for the apprehension of arrest.

The judgement arose from approximately 280 petitions, including one led by Radhika Agarwal, which contested the compatibility of the Customs Act and GST Act with the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) and constitutional provisions. The court dismissed challenges to Sections 69 and 70 of the GST Act and Section 104 of the Customs Act, ruling in favour of the legislature's authority to enact laws that criminalise tax violations.

The Chief Justice highlighted that the amendments to the Customs Act now classify certain offences as cognisable, allowing customs officers to make arrests without a prior magistrate's warrant. Additionally, parties arrested by customs officers retain the right to consult a lawyer during interrogation. *—PTI*

GAFX RETURNS TO BENGALURU

Biocon Founder Kiran Mazumdar Shaw and IT and BT Priyank Kharge inaugurate GAFX summit at Lalith Ashok in Bengaluru on Thursday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

India raps 'failed state' Pak in UN

UNITED NATIONS/ GENEVA, 27 FEB

India slammed Pakistan after it raked the issue of Jammu and Kashmir in the UN Human Rights Council. It said saying the "failed state" that survives on "international handouts" "dutifully" spreads "falsehoods handed down by its military-terrorist complex."

India exercised its Right of Reply at the 58th Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on Wednesday to lodge a retort to Pakistan.

Counsellor at India's Permanent Mission to the UN in Geneva Kshitij Tyagi said it is unfortunate that this Council's time continues to be wasted by Pakistan. Its rhetoric reeks of hypocrisy; its actions, of inhumanity; and its governance, of incompetence."

He emphasised that as a country where human rights abuses, persecution of minorities and systematic erosion of democratic values constitute state policies, and which brazenly harbours UN-sanctioned terrorists, Pakistan is in no position to lecture anyone.

He asserted Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh were, are and will always remain an integral and inalienable part of India. "Instead of its unhealthy obsession with India, Pakistan should focus on providing actual governance and justice to its own people," he said. *—PTI*

India, EU at impasse over carbon tax, tariffs

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

A meeting of the top leadership of India and the European Union (EU) Chief Ursula von der Leyen on Friday is expected to give fresh impetus to efforts to seal an ambitious free trade agreement (FTA).

Especially against the backdrop of US President Donald Trump's threat to hit the 27-member bloc with 25 per cent tariffs.

While, India and the EU have been moving ahead with talks to ink a deal as soon as possible, both sides are yet to agree on a number of contentious issues.

For India, the biggest sticking point remains the carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM), a measure approved in 2023 and expected to be implemented from January 2026.

This seeks to impose tariffs on imports of high-carbon goods including steel, cement and aluminium, aiming to reach net-zero greenhouse emissions by 2050.

Ursula von der Leyen, accompanied by senior EU officials, commenced her two- day visit to India on Thursday. Von der Leyen characterised India as "a trusted friend and strategic ally" for Europe, highlighting the importance of their partnership amidst global conflicts. India's trade with the EU reached USD 135 billion in the financial year 2023-24, solidifying the EU's position as New Delhi's largest trading partner. *—PTI*

EAM S Jaishankar meets EU Chief President Ursula von der Leyen in New Delhi *PHOTO: PTI*

US firms can buy Gold Card to hire Indians: Trump

WASHINGTON, 27 FEB

US President Donald Trump said that the newly proposed 'gold card' initiative will allow American companies to hire Indian graduates from top US universities like Harvard and Stanford.

Trump on Wednesday unveiled the 'gold card' initiative for wealthy foreigners, giving them the right to live and work in the country and offering a path to citizenship in exchange for a USD 5 million fee.

Trump said the current immigration system has hindered top international talent, especially from India, from staying and working in the US.

"A person comes from India, China, Japan, and other countries, attends Harvard or the Wharton School of Finance... they receive job offers, but the offer is immediately revoked because there's no certainty about whether that person can stay in the country," he said.

Trump said that because of this, many talented graduates, who were forced to leave the US, became successful entrepreneurs back home.

"They return to India or their home country, start businesses, and become billionaires, employing thousands," he said.

Trump said that a company can buy a gold card and use it for this recruitment matter. Trump said the sale of the cards will begin in about two weeks and suggested millions of such cards could be sold. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 6

Rajamouli's friend kills self, blames director

HYDERABAD, 27 FEB

Director SS Rajamouli on Wednesday was accused of torture by his old friend and former collaborator U Srinivasa Rao, who died by suicide.

Srinivasa Rao, a 34-year-old friend of Rajamouli and the executive producer of Yamadonga, allegedly sent a selfie video and a letter to the close friends of the filmmaker before he died. Rao said he shares 34-year old friendship with SS Rajamouli, which got jeopardized after both of them developed feelings for the same person. "I have no option but to die by suicide. Rajamouli is the reason I am still single at 55," Srinivasa Rao stated in his video. He claimed that he stepped back from pursuing the relationship for the sake of their friendship but the director later turned against him. . "We worked together until 'Yamadonga', but he ruined my career," he added. *—Agencies*

OVER CANCER CONCERNS

Karnataka bans plastic use in idli preparation

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

Karnataka's Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao has announced a ban on the use of plastic in the preparation of idlis, following alarming test results that revealed the presence of carcinogenic elements in samples collected from various hotels across the state. The Karnataka Food Safety Department discovered that 52 establishments were using polythene sheets for cooking idlis, raising serious health concerns.

During an inquiry, the Food Safety Department collected idli samples from 251 locations and found that a number of hotels had shifted from traditional cloth to plastic for cooking. "Hoteliers should never have done this because plastic is carcinogenic, meaning it can cause cancer. These harmful elements can enter the idli," Rao informed reporters.

The Minister emphasised that the use of plastic poses significant health risks, as toxic chemicals can leach into food. Rao stated, "If anyone continues this practice, it should be brought to our notice." He further urged all hotels and food establishments to discontinue the use of plastic immediately and to consider safer alternatives, such as stainless steel plates or banana leaves.

In a post on 'X,' Rao reiterated the government's commitment to public health, stating, "The use of plastic in idli preparation has been increasing and posing severe health risks. To safeguard public health, plastic in cooking idlis has been strictly banned." Action has already begun against non-compliant establishments, sending a clear message across Karnataka regarding food safety standards. *—PTI*

K'taka sees 1st bird flu case this year in Chikkaballapur

CHIKKABALLAPUR, 27 FEB

Karnataka has reported its first-ever case of bird flu in Varadahalli, Chikkaballapur taluk, confirmed Rangappa HN, Deputy Director of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Biologicals. Rangappa stated that among the samples sent to the Central Laboratory in Bengaluru, one tested positive, with the report being made available today. Following this, Deputy Commissioner Ravindra convened an emergency meeting with officials from the Health, Animal Husbandry, Police, and other concerned departments to assess the situation and implement containment measures. The Deputy Commissioner instructed the Health Department to coordinate closely with the Animal Husbandry Department, while the Police Department was directed to set up checkpoints to prevent the movement of birds between villages. A team from the Animal Husbandry Department visited Varadahalli, surveyed the village, and found around 350 birds. All of them will be culled tomorrow as a precautionary step. Villagers have been advised not to transfer birds to neighboring houses and to keep them covered at night. The culled birds will be buried in a two-meter-deep pit, wrapped in gunny bags, and covered with limestone before being sealed with mud. *—Salar News*

Biker killed while overtaking bus in Hebbal

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

A 45-year-old man lost his life in a road accident while allegedly attempting to overtake a school bus within Hebbal traffic police station limits on Thursday morning. The deceased Mahapatra, was a resident of Mariyappana Palya and an employee at a private firm in Bengaluru. The incident occurred around 6.45am near Esteem Mall. According to traffic police, he lost control of his bike and fell under the wheels of the bus. Mahapatra sustained severe injuries and succumbed to them while being rushed to the hospital. A case has been registered, and the body was shifted to MS Ramaiah Hospital for a post-mortem examination. *—Salar News*

Mysuru youth kills self by jumping under KSRTC bus

MYSURU, 27 FEB

A dejected youth killed himself by jumping under the wheels of a KSRTC bus at Maddur KSRTC bus stand in Mandya district in the wee hours of Thursday. Police identified the deceased as Arun, 23, a resident of Tubinakere village in Malavalli taluk. Police have recovered CCTV footage of the youth jumping under the bus. Maddur Town Police have registered a case and an investigation is underway. *—Salar News*

Blinkit to deliver Apple products in 10 min in B'luru

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

Quick commerce player Blinkit has started delivering Apple products, including MacBook Air, iPad and AirPods, within 10 minutes in select cities including Bengaluru, its founder & CEO Albinder Dhindsa said on Thursday. In a post on X, he said consumers can now get MacBook Air, iPad, AirPods, Apple Watch, and other Apple accessories delivered in 10 minutes. "We've started delivering in - Delhi NCR, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Pune, Lucknow, Ahmedabad, Chandigarh, Chennai, Jaipur, Bengaluru and Kolkata," he wrote. In the quarter that ended 31 December, the quick commerce business of Zomato incurred a Rs 103 crore loss largely on account of pulling forward the growth investments. In the letter to shareholders, Zomato stated that the company expects the losses in quick commerce business under Blinkit to continue in the near term due to the investments. *—PTI*

B'luru GAFX unveils future of AVGC-XR sector

300 animation, visual effects, gaming, comics & extended reality studios employ 15,000

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

Bengaluru GAFX 2025, India's premier AVGC-XR (Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, Comics, and Extended Reality) conference opened on Thursday serving as a platform for creators, investors, and innovators to collaborate and explore new frontiers.

Organised by the Karnataka Ministry of Electronics, IT and Biotechnology, the three-day event spotlights the convergence of creativity and technology shaping the future of storytelling, gaming, and visual experiences.

The event runs until 1 March and is expected to draw over 20,000 attendees. ""With India set to become the world's largest gaming market by 2028, Karnataka aims to be the nation's esports capital. This year, we hope to launch Karnataka's very own National Esports Festival," said Priyank Kharge, Karnataka's IT and BT Minister. He also emphasised the need for the right policies to expand India's contribution to the animation and gaming market. This year's edition, themed 'Future of Immersion: Experience, Explore and Disrupt' features a first-of-its-kind India Pavilion, showcasing AVGC talent from 12 states, along with an Investor Connect programme where 50 startups will pitch to over 25 investors. Chairman of Bengaluru GAFX and President ABAI, Biren Ghose said that the event is expected to host the grand finale of the national e-sports championship, with top teams battling it out in a multiplayer tactical first-person shooter video game, Counter-Strike 2.

IT and BT Minister Priyank Kharge with others at Bengaluru GAFX 2025 on Thursday *PHOTO: X/@AUSCGBENGALURU*

National and global collaboration in focus

The conference also highlights collaborations with global players from France, the UK, Australia, and Italy, strengthening Karnataka's position as a key player in the global digital content economy.

Dr Ekroop Caur, Secretary, Department of ITBT that GAFX is India's gateway to global AVGC-XR leadership. "Our vision is to transform Karnataka into the global capital of immersive content creation through strategic collaborations, policy support, and nurturing talent," she said.

Highlighting the state government's commitment in supporting the startups and global studios in the digital media sector, Priyank Kharge said that Karnataka, the first state to introduce an AVGC-XR policy in 2012, is now home to over 300 AVGC studios with more than 15,000 professionals. *—Salar News*

Gamers to battle it out for ₹5L prize

Bengaluru GAFX 2025 saw the launch of the Skyesports Souvenir 2025 National Esports Championship, a first-of-its-kind national Counter-Strike 2 tournament backed by the State. Counter-Strike is a series of shooter video games. Nation's top four teams—Flashback Gaming, Big W, Victores Sumus, and Gods Reign— are now squaring off for the Rs 5 lakh prize pool and national glory.

Childhood favs Suppandi, Amar Chitra Katha come to life with AI

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

Who's ready for Suppandi — the clueless, ever-suspicious, yet loveable goofball — to leap off the comic pages and into an AI-powered animated adventure?

That's right. Suppandi, the village simpleton who's been making Tinkle readers laugh since 1983, is stepping into the world of cutting-edge animation, reimagined in glorious 3D using the latest AI-driven animation technology.

Unveiled at Bengaluru GAFX 2025 on Thursday, the Suppandi Animated Show marked its grand world premiere, blending nostalgia with modern storytelling tech. And who better to launch this iconic character into the future than actor-producer and lifelong Tinkle fan Rana Daggubati, beaming with the glee of a fanboy turned filmmaker, further revealed the teaser for Wingstar, Tinkle's very own superheroine from the Northeast, who's not only getting her animated debut but is also set for a live-action adaptation, developed with a collaboration between Zebu Animation Studios and Amar Chitra Katha (ACK).

"These characters shaped my love for storytelling," Daggubati said, "and bringing them to a new generation, especially here in Bengaluru, feels like coming full circle."

Actor Rana Daggubati at Bengaluru GAFX *PHOTO: X/ @GAFXBENGALURU*

Preeti Vyas, CEO of ACK said to bring these characters to life with AI and share them with a new generation is a dream come true. *—Salar News*

KIA opens largest domestic cargo terminal

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

Kempegowda International Airport, Bengaluru, managed by Bangalore International Airport Limited (BIAL) in collaboration with Menzies Aviation, has inaugurated India's largest Greenfield Domestic Cargo Terminal (DCT) based on designed capacity.

Spanning 245,000 square feet, this advanced facility is a significant enhancement to BLR Airport's cargo handling capabilities and aims to address the burgeoning demands of the domestic market. The DCT is set to play a pivotal role in connecting industries, fortifying supply chains, and promoting a more sustainable future for domestic cargo operations, establishing BLR Airport as a leader in this sector.

Located over seven acres, the DCT boasts a peak handling capacity of approximately

360,000 metric tons, with future expansion potential to 400,000 metric tons. It features 42 truck docks, over 400 specialised cargo bins, integrated conveyors with X-ray machines, and around 30 Unit Load Device (ULD) build-up and breakdown stations.

Satyaki Raghunath, BIAL's COO, said this has been in the making for two to three years, noting the shift in focus from international to domestic cargo, in the post-Covid landscape. He emphasised the growth in cargo volumes, expecting to exceed 5,00,000 metric tons this year. *—PT*

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar with Union Home Minister Amit Shah during Mahashivratri function organised by Isha Foundation's Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev in Coimbatore *PHOTO: SALAR*

Born Hindu and will die Hindu, says DKS

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

Deputy Chief Minister and state Congress president, DK Shivakumar, has faced criticism from within his party over his attendance at Mahashivaratri celebrations in Tamil Nadu, where Union Home Minister Amit Shah was also present. In response to the discontent, Shivakumar firmly declared, "I am a born Hindu and will die as one."

The controversy arose after All India Congress Committee (AICC) secretary PV Mohan publicly questioned Shivakumar's attendance at the event hosted by spiritual leader Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev at his Isha Yoga Centre in Coimbatore. Mohan expressed concerns that supporting individuals associated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) could mislead party members and harm the party's secular image. During a press conference, Shivakumar defended his decision, noting that Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has a name linked to Lord Shiva. He recounted his positive experiences at the Mahakumbh celebration, stating, "It is not a small job. I appreciate the organisation." *—PTI*

1 held for making obscene gesture at Congress worker

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

A 43-year-old man was arrested for allegedly making an obscene gesture toward a Youth Congress member while driving here, police said on Thursday.

Harsha HB, a resident of Vijayanagar, was arrested in connection with the incident, which occurred on Wednesday on Mysuru-Bengaluru Road near Gopalan Mall, they added. The incident came to light after Akshatha Ravikumar, State Secretary of the Karnataka Pradesh Youth Congress posted a video on 'X' showing the man making an obscene gesture toward her while driving.

According to the police, the investigation revealed that she was driving her car when she overtook the suspect's vehicle, leading to an exchange of words between them. She also recorded a video of the act. "This was triggered by a misunderstanding, and appropriate action has been taken," a senior police officer said. *—PTI*

BSY TURNS 82

Former chief minister BS Yediyurappa, who turned 82 years old with his family members on Thursday *PHOTO: SALAR*

COUNTDOWN TO RAMADAN

City Sehri team aims to feed thousands daily

HAMEED ASHRAF
BENGALURU, 27 FEB

When Ramadan's Taraweeh prayers end at Bengaluru's mosques and worshippers disperse, 28-year-old Sadiq Rahmathulla and his team begin their work—preparing and distributing Sehri meals to those in need.

The initiative began during the pandemic under the guidance of Sadiq's grandfather, former BBMP councillor Khalaq, in Shivajinagar. "We saw students, senior citizens, and migrants struggling to access early morning meals during Ramadan. Many couldn't cook or store food, so we decided to step in," says Sadiq. Initially covering Frazer Town, Vasanth Nagar, and Lingarajapuram, the effort gradually expanded

city-wide. With volunteers including students, food delivery workers, and professionals, the team built a network of support. Several hotels offered free meals, while volunteers personally delivered food on bikes.

Over time, women from the community joined in, cooking fresh meals for the service. "Home-cooked food gave it a personal touch and ensured better quality," Sadiq says. Local donors provide rice, oil, and packaging, while hotel owners like Ibrahim contribute bulk supplies, including rice bags and food boxes.

Each night after Taraweeh, the team meets in person or coordinates via calls and WhatsApp to finalise plans. By 4am, volunteers ensure hot meals—rice, dal, chapati, vegetables, fruits, and occasionally chicken curry or kebabs—reach the needy across the city. The team also launched 'bangaloresehri.in,' a website where people can request meals or connect with nearby volunteers. During the pandemic, they served 2,000 to 3,000 meals daily. With increased support, they aim to distribute 20,000 meals per day, from the first Sehri on 1 March. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: SALAR

CRIME BEAT

Bidar family stages robbery drama to escape from creditors

BIDAR, 27 FEB

An alleged daylight robbery and knife-attack on a housewife in Koutha (B) village of Bidar district's Aurad taluk had triggered panic among the people a few days ago. However, a detailed investigation found that the family had fabricated the robbery incident to escape from the pressure of creditors.

Omkara Aparao Gadage, a resident of Koutha (B) village, registered a case at Santpur police station on 21 February, alleging that when his wife Preeti was alone at home, two masked men entered the house through the back door, attacked her with a knife and took away 25 tolas of gold ornaments and Rs 1 lakh cash.

A team led by Superintendent of Police Pradeep Gunti visited the spot on the day of the incident and conducted preliminary investigation. The police later formed four teams to investigate the alleged crime.

However, during further probe, inconsistencies in the family's statements made the police suspicious and prompted a search of the house. The gold and cash that were allegedly stolen were found hidden inside the house.

"The family staged this drama as they were unable to repay their debts. There is no need for people to panic. We are committed to people's security and protecting their property. Strict action will be taken against those who file such false cases," Gunti said. *—Salar News*

Murder convict caught after 11 years

KALABURAGI, 27 FEB

After evading capture for 11 years, a fugitive who assaulted and murdered an on-duty police officer, escaped from jail, has been arrested by the Kalaburagi Sub-Urban Police. The accused, as Ambarish Ambadas Natikar from Bhagodi, Chittapur Taluk, was involved in a violent altercation in 2009 in Biddapura Colony, Kalaburagi. He attacked and fatally injured on-duty police officer. *—Salar News*

Cops bust fake marksheet racket; 1 held

KALABURAGI, 27 FEB

The Kalaburagi CEN police have busted a racket involved in producing and selling fake marksheets under the names of 28 universities and colleges across multiple states in India.

Rajeev Singh Arora Premsingh, the key accused a resident of Rama Park Apartments, Dwarka Mor, Delhi, has been arrested in connection with the case. *—Salar News*

Seven held in history-sheeter's murder

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

Ashoknagar police announced on Thursday that they have apprehended seven individuals, including two known rowdy sheeters, in relation to the murder of Haider Ali, who was brutally killed near the Football Stadium last week. Investigators revealed that the attack was rooted in long-standing personal rivalries among local gangs. *—Salar News*

3 attack HSR hotel owner over parking

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

The HSR Layout police have apprehended a jeweller and two of his associates for allegedly assaulting a hotel owner and issuing death threats after being confronted about damage to a parked vehicle. The arrested individuals have been identified as 36-year-old Vishnucharan Bhat, owner of a jewellery store, associates Kevin Thomas and Satish Swamy. *—Salar News*

Goyal: Ridiculous to blame farmers for Delhi pollution

MUMBAI, 27 FEB

Union Minister Piyush Goyal has called it "ridiculous" to blame farmers in Punjab for pollution affecting Delhi, situated 500 km away.

Speaking at an IMC Chamber of Commerce and Industry event, Goyal urged attendees to consider the logistics of how pollution travels through urban areas before attributing the problem to stubble burning by farmers. While acknowledging the pollution issue, he identified construction activities and vehicular emissions as primary contributors. Goyal advocated for a shift to precast construction methods and electric mobility, emphasising their economic advantages.

He challenged industry leaders to assess their role in combating pollution and noted the stark differences in urban cleanliness between Indian cities and places like Dubai or Singapore. *—PTI*

No talks on KPCC leadership change: Satheesan

KOCHI, 27 FEB

Senior Congress figure VD Satheesan has dismissed reports suggesting a potential leadership change within the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC). Addressing reporters, Satheesan claimed he would be informed of any such discussions and insisted there are no disagreements among party leaders regarding the current leadership of K Sudhakaran. He noted that the All India Congress Committee (AICC) had summoned state PCC leaders, including those from Kerala, Bihar, West Bengal, and Assam, to strategise for the upcoming assembly elections in 2026. "There are no problems amongst us," he stated, underlining that leadership changes are decided by the Congress high command at the appropriate time. His comments followed Shashi Tharoor's strong endorsement of Sudhakaran's position as KPCC chief. *—PTI*

Indian fishermen repatriated from SL reach home

CHENNAI, 27 FEB

A total of 27 Indian fishermen repatriated by Sri Lanka have returned to the country, officials reported. The fishermen, who were arrested by the Sri Lankan navy for allegedly breaching the maritime boundary, arrived in Chennai on Wednesday via air travel. The High Commission of India in Colombo facilitated their return. Upon arrival, the state government organised transportation for the fishermen to ensure their safe journey back to their homes. The group had set off from Rameswaram in December before being detained by Sri Lankan authorities. *—PTI*

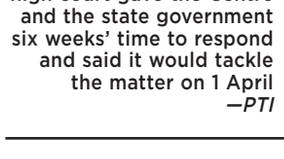


PHOTO: ANI

Uttarakhand HC asks if govt willing to change UCC

NAINITAL, 27 FEB

The Uttarakhand High Court has asked the state if it was willing to make necessary changes to the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in the state. A division bench of Justices Manoj Tiwari and Ashish Naithani posed the question to solicitor general Tushar Mehta while hearing a PIL challenging provisions over live-in relationships. The PIL, like its predecessors, took exception to the registration forms for live-in relationships, alleging that the information violates the privacy of such couples. The pleas also challenged provisions in which a woman would have to announce her pregnancy status to terminate the live-in relationship. The high court gave the Centre and the state government six weeks' time to respond and said it would tackle the matter on 1 April *—PTI*

Stalin: 25+ North Indian languages lost due to Hindi

Hindi is the mask, Sanskrit is the face, says TN Chief Minister

CHENNAI, 27 FEB

Upping the ante against alleged Hindi imposition by the Centre, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin said the state will not allow the "imposition."

"Will oppose Hindi imposition. Hindi is the mask, Sanskrit is the hidden face," he said in a letter to party men.

In the letter, Stalin claimed many north Indian languages spoken in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh such as Mythili, Brajbhasha, Bundelkhandi and Awadhi "have been destroyed by the hegemonic Hindi."

"More than 25 north Indian native languages have been destroyed by the invasion of hegemonic Hindi-Sanskrit languages. The century-old Dravidian movement safeguarded Tamil and its culture because of the awareness it created and the various agitations," the ruling DMK chief said.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin said the state will continue to oppose the NEP **PHOTO: PTI**

The ruling DMK has been alleging Hindi imposition by the Centre through the 3-language formula as part of the National Education Policy (NEP).

Countering BJP's contention that the third language according to the NEP could be even a foreign one, Stalin claimed that according to the 3-language policy schedule, "only Sanskrit is being promoted in many states."

"If Tamil Nadu accepts the trilingual policy, the mother language will be ignored and there will be Sankritisation in the future," he said.

- Stalin claimed that only Sanskrit was being promoted as the third language in many states. Sanskritisation would lead to an erasure of the mother tongue, he said

"This makes it clear the Centre has planned to do away with languages like Tamil and impose Sanskrit," the CM charged.

Dravidian stalwart and former Chief Minister CN Annadurai had mandated the two-language policy in the state decades ago to make it clear "there is no place for imposition of Aryan culture through Hindi-Sanskrit and destruction of Tamil culture," Stalin said. *—PTI*

AAP MLAs, Atishi stopped at Delhi Assembly gate

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Leader of Opposition Atishi and other AAP MLAs were stopped from entering the Delhi Assembly premises on Thursday, following which they staged a dharna outside.

Former AAP chief minister Atishi said the BJP was "crossing all limits of dictatorship".

AAP MLAs were suspended from the assembly over disruptions in the House proceedings during Lt Governor VK Saxena's address on Tuesday.

The AAP said it was protesting the alleged removal of BR Ambedkar's portrait from the CM's office.

Following their suspension Atishi lashed out at the BJP, accusing it of trying to erase Ambedkar's legacy.

"The BJP has shown its true colours by removing Babasaheb Ambedkar's portrait. Does it believe Prime Minister Narendra Modi can replace Babasaheb?" she said.

Earlier on X, Atishi said, "AAP MLAs were suspended from the House for three days for raising slogans of 'Jai Bhim'. Today, they are not even being allowed to enter the premises."

Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Atishi and other AAP MLAs stage a dharna outside the Assembly, in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

"This has never happened in the history of the Delhi Legislative Assembly," she added.

On Tuesday, 21 out of 22 AAP MLAs, including Atishi, were suspended from the House.

The suspension came when the Delhi government tabled a Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report on the liquor policy.

The audit, conducted between 2017 and 2021, pointed to significant lapses in the licensing process, pricing mechanisms, and regulatory oversight.

The report alleged that the policy led to Rs 2,002 crore revenue losses, benefiting private companies at the expense of public funds.

The report has been referred to the PAC for a detailed probe, with findings expected within three months. *—PTI*

Nation got new consciousness at Maha Kumbh: PM

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday likened the massive Maha Kumbh congregation to the newly awakened consciousness of a nation breathing freely after breaking the shackles of a mindset steeped in centuries-old slavery.

Modi said more devotees than anyone could imagine took the holy dip in Sangam, asserting that India is now forging ahead with a new energy and this points to a turn of era which will write India's new future.

He offered apology to "Mother Ganga, Mother Yamuna, Mother Saraswati" as well as the people, who he said are a form of God to him, for any shortcoming in the services rendered.

Modi noted that making arrangement for an event unfolding at such an enormous scale was not an easy task. Pilgrims almost double the US population participated in the Maha Kumbh mela, he added. —PTI

J&K parties fume as Centre bars funeral of Hurriyat kin

SRINAGAR, 27 FEB

Jammu and Kashmir's ruling National Conference and opposition Peoples Democratic Party criticised police for not allowing funeral prayers of the father-in-law of Hurriyat Conference chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq at the Jamia Masjid.

The authorities sealed the mosque by erecting barricades outside. The control of police lies with the lieutenant governor of the union territory.

"The decision to disallow the Namaz-e-Janazah of Dr Sibtain Masoodi at Jama Masjid, Srinagar is deeply regrettable and wrong." the National Conference on X.

Farooq's father-in-law Ghulam Sibtain Masoodi, 80, died on Wednesday after prolonged illness. *—PTI*

Working towards resolution on Ladakh: China defence ministry

BEIJING, 27 FEB

The Chinese Defence Ministry has confirmed that the armed forces of India and China are comprehensively implementing resolutions to resolve the ongoing standoff in eastern Ladakh.

During a media briefing, spokesman Sr Col Wu Qian stated, "At present, the Chinese and Indian militaries are implementing the resolutions in a comprehensive and effective manner."

He expressed China's readiness to collaborate with India to maintain peace and stability in the border regions. This announcement follows the successful completion of troop disengagement in late 2022, resulting in a pact for withdrawal from Depsang and Demchok, the final two points of contention in eastern Ladakh. This development marks the end of over four years of strained relations.

Sr Col Wu Qian **PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA**

- The Chinese defence ministry is ready to collobarate with India to maintain peace and stability in the border regions, and confirmed that both sides are implementing all resolutions

Following the agreement, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping discussed the matter during a meeting in Kazan, Russia, on 23 October. They agreed to revive various dialogue mechanisms. Subsequently, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held talks on 18 December, while Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri met with his Chinese counterpart in Beijing on 26 January.

India has reiterated that full normalisation of relations is contingent upon achieving peace along the border. *—PTI*

Bihar cabinet reshuffle: New portfolios assigned

PATNA, 27 FEB

Portfolios have been allocated to seven new ministers in Bihar following a cabinet expansion on Wednesday, with significant changes among existing members, including a deputy chief minister.

Most of the new appointments have been made within the ruling BJP, which now holds 21 seats in the cabinet of 36. Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Kumar Sinha has been relieved of the key road construction portfolio, now assigned to Nitin Nabin, who will pass on the law department to Mangal Pandey. Sinha retains his roles in mines and geology and gains agriculture, previously held by Pandey, who continues to oversee health.

Santosh Kumar Suman, the son of Union Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi, keeps the minor water resources portfolio, while the new entrants Krishna Kumar Mantu and Vijay Kumar Mandal receive Information Technology and Disaster Management, respectively.

Nitish Mishra maintains the industry portfolio but transfers tourism to new minister Raju Kumar Singh.

Prem Kumar retains cooperatives, while Sunil Kumar takes responsibility for environment, forestry and climate change. Sanjay Saraogi, entering the cabinet for the first time, is assigned revenue and land reforms, previously managed by state BJP president Dilip Jaiswal. Jibesh Kumar has re-entered as minister with urban development and housing, while newcomer Moti Lal Prasad takes on art, culture and youth affairs. *—PTI*

From left: BJP MLAs Sanjay Saraogi, Sunil Kumar, Jibesh Kumar, Raju Kumar Singh, taking the oath as state minister during a ceremony at Raj Bhavan, in Patna **PHOTO: PTI**

NON-BAILABLE OFFENCE

Actor Posani Krishna held for remarks against Naidu

AMARAVATI/ HYDERABAD, 26 FEB

Popular Telugu film actor, writer and politician Posani Krishna Murali was arrested in Hyderabad for allegedly making derogatory remarks about Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and Deputy CHief Minister Pawan Kalyan.

Police picked up the star from his residence near New Science Colony, Yellareddyguda, Hyderabad.

AHe was arrested under BNS Sections 196, 353 (2), and 111 read with 3 (5), along with BNSS Section 47 (1) and (2).

"The offence he is accused of is cognisable and non-bailable in nature, and he has been forwarded to the Additional Judicial Magistrate of 1st Class, Rajampet, for judicial custody," stated the notice served under the authority of Sambepalli sub-inspector.

Posani Krishna Murali **PHOTO: FB**

Police have are shifting the actor to Andhra Pradesh.

Krishna Murali's arrest comes shortly after the arrest of former Gannavaram MLA and YSRCP leader Vallabhaneni Vamsi. Krishna Murali was associated with the YS Jagan Mohan Reddy-led YSRCP and had also served as the chairman of the Andhra Pradesh Film, TV, and Theatre Development Corporation (APFTTDC) during the previous YSRCP regime. *—PTI*

Cong says Modi govt must stand up to Trump's tariffs

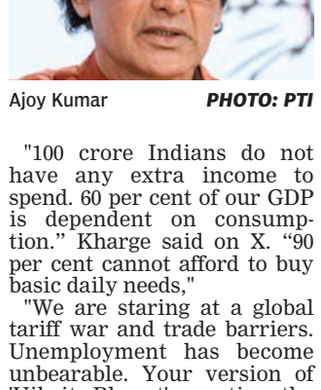
NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Flagging US President Donald Trump's push for reciprocal tariffs, the Congress said the Modi government must stand up to the "humiliation" and tell its American counterpart that such moves would not be acceptable to India as they would "destroy" the country's economy.

"Trump keeps calling India a tariff violator but Narendra Modi remained silent," Congress leader Ajoy Kumar said.

"Due to reciprocal tariff, the country's GDP will decline by 0.5 to 0.6 per cent. The condition of the country will deteriorate subsequently," he added.

Meanwhile, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge claimed the Modi's version of Viksit Bharat was draining the country.



Ajoy Kumar **PHOTO: PTI**

"100 crore Indians do not have any extra income to spend. 60 per cent of our GDP is dependent on consumption." Kharge said on X. "90 per cent cannot afford to buy basic daily needs,"

"We are staring at a global tariff war and trade barriers. Unemployment has become unbearable. Your version of 'Viksit Bharat' empties the pockets of ordinary Indians and fills the coffers of billionaires," he added. *—PTI*

Education ministry slams Pitroda

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The Education Ministry refuted Sam Pitroda claims regarding a disrupted lecture at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Ranchi. The ministry clarified that there is no IIT in the Jharkhand capital, only an Indian Institute of Information Technology (IIIT) but that there was no record of Pitroda being invited to speak there.

In a video shared X on 22 February, Pitroda alleged that his lecture was interrupted by a hacker displaying pornographic content.

The ministry condemned his remarks as "baseless and reckless". Asserting that the comments could damage the reputation of the institution, the ministry called him an "uninformed person". *—Agencies*

DIDI AIMS FOR 215 SEATS

Abhishek rubbishes speculation of rift with Mamata

KOLKATA, 27 FEB

TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee rejected reports that he has differences with party supremo Mamata Banerjee and reaffirmed his loyalty to her.

"I am a loyal soldier of the TMC, and my leader is Mamata Banerjee," he said at a party conference.

Dismissing speculation that he might cross over to the BJP, he said, "Those who are saying that I am joining BJP are spreading canards. Even with a severed head, I will say Mamata Banerjee Zindabad. "

Speaking at the event, Banerjee set an ambitious goal of winning more than 215 of the total 294 seats in the state assembly in the 2026 polls, emphasising that the TMC would work to reduce the BJP's tally and secure a fourth consecutive term.

"I agree with Abhishek that we should aim for at least one more seat than our 2021 tally. Our goal should be to secure 215 seats or more while ensuring that BJP, CPIM, and Congress candidates struggle to retain their deposits," Banerjee asserted.

Banerjee launched a sharp attack on the BJP, accusing it of using agencies like the Enforcement Directorate (ED), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), and Income Tax Department to target opposition leaders. "Before elections, they decide whom to send to jail, whom to charge, and whom to brand corrupt! Don't they feel ashamed? They haven't even resolved the RG Kar case," she stated.

"The BJP has ED-CBI-Income Tax trio backing them, but they lack the courage to fight on the ground. We will dismantle their 'chakravyuh'. We have done it before and will do it again," Abhishek Banerjee added. *—PTI*

Abhishek Banerjee **PHOTO: ANI**

Even with a severed head, I will say Mamata Banerjee Zindabad

-Abhishek Banerjee

'BJP enrolled fake voters'

Kolkata, 27 Feb

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee accused the BJP of enrolling fake voters from other states and warned of an indefinite dharna.

"How the BJP is manipulating voters' list with the EC is very clear," she claimed. "In Delhi and Maharashtra, the BJP won elections by enrolling fake voters from Haryana and Gujarat. "If I can go for 26 days hunger strike (in 2006), then we can against the EC," *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Kerala fishermen hold hartal against offshore mining

KOCHI, 27 FEB

A coastal hartal launched by fishermen's unions under the Kerala Fisheries Coordination Committee (KFCC) to oppose the Central government's permission for offshore mining commenced at midnight on Wednesday. Fishermen refrained from fishing activities and disrupted activities at ports, landing centres and markets along Kerala's coast from Kasaragod to Thiruvananthapuram. The hartal will end at midnight on Thursday. The KFCC, which includes various fishing trade unions, the support of major political parties, including the ruling CPI(M) and the opposition Congress. The central government plans to auction sand blocks for offshore mining in five areas: Kollam South, Kollam North, Alappuzha, Ponnani and Chavakkad. An meeting was conducted in Kollam on 17 February, with a Parliament march scheduled for 12 March. *—PTI*

Principal blamed after student loses vision in one eye

MORADABAD, 27 FEB

A Class 3 student at a primary school allegedly suffered a severe eye injury, leading to a loss of vision in one eye, with the mother accusing the school principal of trashing the student. In her complaint, she claimed her daughter, Himanshi, was blinded due to the severe injuries inflicted by the principal, Geeta Karal. However, Karal denied the allegations, saying Himanshi already had a weak eyesight and was accidently elbowed by a student. The situation escalated when Himanshi's mother visited the school, requesting a medical certificate from the principal. When her request was denied, Jyoti allegedly threatened the principal. Authorities are investigating the incident that occurred on Tuesday at Bhogpur Mithoni Primary School. *—PTI*

Thane man bites off & swallows part of friends ear

THANE, 27 FEB

A Thane resident allegedly bit off a part of his friend's ear and swallowed it after the two got into an argument at a party. The incident occurred in a posh housing society in the Patlipada area on Wednesday morning. In his complaint, Shravan Leekha, 37, said that he and accused Vikas Menon, 32, were partying with friends when the two got into an altercation. Menon suddenly became violent and bit off a part of his ear and swallowed it. Leekha said he was then rushed to a hospital for treatment. Police have booked Menon for voluntarily causing grievous hurt under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita section 117 (2), the official added. *—PTI*

Wild tusker found dead in septic tank in Malappuram

MALAPPURAM, 27 FEB

A more than 40 years old wild elephant was found dead on Thursday morning in an unused septic tank near the Karulai forest area in Malappuram, Kerala. An official said that the septic tank constructed for labourers working in a nearby brick manufacturing unit was barely two meters deep and covered with a polythene sheet. Therefore a fall into the tank may not be the reason for the elephant's death. "The exact cause of death can be confirmed only after a post mortem," the official said. The elephant, popular among local residents as 'kasera komban' (chair tusker) by the locals was frequently seen in the area but has never attacked anyone. The reason for the naming was its huge tusks looked like arms of a chair. *—PTI*

Pune cops declare ₹1L reward on rape accused

Sena leader likens bus station incident to Nirbhaya case

MUMBAI, 27 FEB

Pune police on Thursday announced a reward of Rs 1 lakh for information leading to the arrest of a history-sheeter who allegedly raped a 26-year-old woman inside a Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) bus at the Swargate bus station here, officials said.

Amid the frantic efforts by the police to crack the case, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut drew parallels between the crime and the 2012 Delhi Nirbhaya gang rape and targeted district guardian minister Ajit Pawar over law and order.

A police official said 13 teams are working to nab the accused, Dattatray Gade, 37, who has been on the run since the incident that took place on an MSRTC bus early Tuesday morning.

A police official said 13 teams are working to nab the accused, Dattatray Ramdas **(inset)**, who is on the run ***PHOTO: PTI***

A reward of Rs 1 lakh will be given to the person providing information about his whereabouts, said Pune police commissioner Amitesh Kumar.

Another police official said information about Gade can be provided at numbers 020-24442769 or 9881670659. The informer's name will be kept secret, he added.

Gade is accused in half a dozen cases of theft, robbery and chain-snatching, registered in Pune and adjoining Ahilyanagar districts, and was out on bail since 2019 in one of the offences.

According to the survivor, she was waiting for a bus to Phaltan in Satara district at one of the platforms around 5.45 am on Tuesday, when a man approached and engaged her in conversation, calling her "didi" (sister), and said the bus to Satara had arrived at another platform.

He took her to an empty bus parked elsewhere on the sprawling station premises. As the lights inside the bus were not on, she hesitated to get in at first, but the man convinced her that it was the right vehicle. He followed her into the bus and raped her before fleeing, the woman, who works in the medical sector, told police. *—PTI*

Navy team set up their gear for the rescue work at the Srisailam Left Bank Canal project site in Nagarkurnool district of Telangana, where a portion of the tunnel collpased ***PHOTO: PTI***

Rescue efforts continue for eight workers trapped in SLBC tunnel

NAGARKURNOOL, 27 FEB

Rescue teams are continuing operations to extract eight individuals trapped in a partially collapsed tunnel for the Srisailam Left Bank Canal (SLBC) project. The teams are currently cutting through parts of the Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM) and other obstacles hindering their access to the trapped workers.

Nagarkurnool Superintendent of Police, Vaibhav Gaikwad, confirmed that repairs to a damaged conveyor belt within the tunnel are expected to be completed today, allowing for the safe transportation of debris. "Gas cutting machines have already been deployed, even working overnight," he stated.

Telangana Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy announced plans to dismantle the stuck TBM using gas cutters, after which military and rescue teams, including the Army, Navy, Rat Miners, and NDRF, will intensify their search efforts without compromising safety.

Amidst concerns over worker safety following the tunnel collapse on 22 February, there have been reports of some labourers considering leaving the site out of fear. A senior government official noted that while initial panic is normal, they have no reports of a mass exodus. Approximately 800 workers are currently engaged in the project, with many from states including Jharkhand, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh.

The trapped personnel, identified as Manoj Kumar, Sri Niwas, Sunny Singh, Gurpreet Singh, Sandeep Sahu, Jegta Xess, Santosh Sahu, and Anuj Sahau, include two engineers and six labourers from various states. Jaiprakash Gaur, founder chairman of Jaypee Group, reiterated the company's commitment to the rescue efforts. *—PTI*

Delhi tutor held for raping student for 3 yrs

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

A 15-year-old girl has alleged that she was repeatedly raped over three years by her tuition teacher in the CR Park area of south Delhi. The accused, a teacher from West Bengal, has been arrested following a formal complaint submitted by the victim and her father on Wednesday. According to police, the girl attended the tuition classes led by the suspect since 2022 and reported incidents of mental harassment and sexual assault at the tuition centre. The accused reportedly threatened and blackmailed her during this time. A case has been registered against the tutor under Section 64 (rape) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. Police apprehended the suspect late on Wednesday night. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

Idols vandalised in village temple; north Bihar tense

SITAMARHI, 27 FEB

Tension gripped the north Bihar district Sitamarhi after idols kept inside a village temple were vandalised by miscreants.

Deputy Superintendent of Ppolice (Sadar) Ram Krishna said the incident was reported from Paramanandpur village where the idols of Lord Shiva and the deity Kartikeya were found desecrated in the morning.

"Villagers allege that they suspect members of a particular community to have engaged in the act late Wednesday night after the Shivratri festivities were over," said the police officer.

He added, "Nobody has seen any of the people entering the temple at the time of the incident. Technical experts have, therefore, been pressed into service to survey the spot and come up with some clues".

"In the meantime, adequate deployment of police has been made in the area to maintain order. Senior officials, led by District Magistrate Richie Pandey, have also visited the village and urged its residents to stay calm", said the officer. *—PTI*

Security personnel disperse a crowd after a violent clash between two communities in Hazaribagh district of Jharkhand ***PHOTO: PTI***

J'khand town calm after clash during Shivratri

HAZARIBAG/RANCHI, 27 FEB

The Ichak town in Jharkhand's Hazaribag district, where clashes broke out between two groups during Maha Shivratri celebrations, is limping back to normalcy with shops and markets opening on Thursday, officials said.

Three persons have been arrested in connection with Wednesday's clash, Ichak Police Station officer-in-charge Santosh Kumar said.

"The situation is peaceful in the Ichak area," said Sub-Divisional Officer RK Gupta. A peace community meeting is scheduled to be held later in the day in connection with the incident, he said. Increased security arrangements have been made to maintain law and order.

Meanwhile, the opposition BJP raised the issue in the Jharkhand assembly, demandeding a fair and thorough probe into the clashes.

As soon as the House met for the day, BJP legislators created a ruckus in the state assembly on the Hazaribagh clash and demanded a fair and transparent probe.

BJP's Barkatha MLA Amit Yadav said that several motorcycles and auto-rickshaws were set on fire during the incident.

"The government should intervene and restore peace there. Minister Irfan Ansari should also seek an apology for accusing BJP workers of being involved in the incident," he said. *—PTI*

HC advises caution in freezing bank accounts

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The Delhi High Court has asked probe agencies to exercise caution over blanket freezing of bank accounts.

The matter before Justice Manoj Jain related to one such action of the agencies on the petitioner company's account, having a withdrawal balance of more than Rs 93 crore, but witnessing an innocuous entry of Rs 200. "Such blanket measures, if taken recourse to, without offering any reason, can certainly play havoc with the financial concerns of such account holders," the HC said.

The case at hand did not suggest that the petitioner was a suspect or accused of any cyber-crime. "The company may not even be connected with the offence under investigation and might be unintended beneficiary," it added.

Instead of freezing the bank account, the court said, authorities should explore the possibility of marking a lien on the disputed amount to mitigate the undue hardship caused to account holders.

Taking note of multiple such cases, the court asked the Ministry of Home Affairs to address the issue and come out with a uniform policy.

While an investigating agency was fully empowered to recommend freezing of the entire account to the bank, the court observed it must assign reasons when doing so. The 20 February order said, "It is high time that the investigating/law enforcement agencies, in the context of freezing bank accounts, act with requisite care, caution and compassion as well." *—PTI*

5.0 magnitude quake hits Assam, no casualties

GUWAHATI, 27 FEB

A magnitude 5.0 earthquake jolted central Assam early on Thursday morning, said an official bulletin. There was no immediate reports of injuries or property damage.

The National Center for Seismology reported that the tremor occurred at 2.25am in Morigaon district, located on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra River, at a depth of 16km. The epicentre was approximately 52km east of Guwahati.

Residents in neighbouring districts, including Kamrup Metropolitan, Nagaon, East and West Karbi Anglong and Hojai felt the quake. Tremors were also experienced in Darrang, Sonitpur and a few districts on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra. *—PTI*

Arjuna Awardee boxer Saweety sues husband for dowry torture

CHANDIGARH, 27 FEB

Arjuna Awardee and former world champion boxer Saweety Boora has lodged an FIR against husband Deepak Hooda, accusing him and his family of assaulting her for dowry.

Boora has lodged the FIR against Hooda, also an Arjuna awardee and Asiad bronze-winning kabaddi player, in Haryana's Hisar on 25 February. The two married in 2022

Seema, SHO of women police station, Hisar, said torture and assault "for more dowry" are among the charges levelled. "A demand for a luxury car was made and met, but her husband beats her, also raises monetary demand," the SHO said.

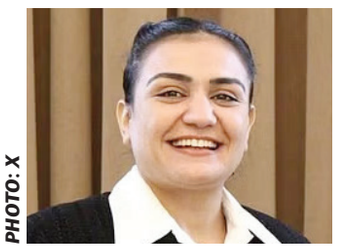


PHOTO: X

The SHO said that Hooda was yet to present his side, "We gave him notice 2-3 times, but he did not turn up."

When PTI reached out to Hooda, he defended his absence by citing his health that has "taken a beating due to the trauma."

"I have submitted a medical certificate and requested a later date. I will certainly go to the police station. I have not been allowed to meet my wife," he said.

Hooda was a part of the Indian kabaddi team which won the gold medal at the South Asian Games in 2016 and the bronze in the 2014 Asian Games. He has also competed in Pro Kabaddi League. Hooda had unsuccessfully contested the 2024 Haryana assembly polls as BJP nominee from Meham constituency in Rohtak district.

Boora, when contacted, refused to comment on the matter.

A case has been registered under Section 85 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita which pertains to a husband or relative of the husband of a woman subjecting her to cruelty. *—PTI*

REMNANTS OF A TRAGEDY

MP govt braces for trial burning of Carbide waste as SC clears hurdle

DHAR/INDORE, 27 FEB

Preparations have begun to incinerate 10 tonnes of the 337 tonnes of Union Carbide waste on a trial basis in Madhya Pradesh's Dhar district after the Supreme Court refused to intervene in the matter, officials said.

Earlier in the day, the apex court declined to interfere with the Madhya Pradesh High Court order on shifting the waste linked with the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy and disposing it at Pithampur in Dhar district. The apex court has asked aggrieved parties, including members of civil society organisations to approach the high court.

PHOTO: PTI

Following the SC's order, the administration increased security in the industrial town Pithampur, an official said. Nearly 500 cops from 24 police stations have been deployed in the area.

Indore Division Commissioner Deepak Singh said, "Preparations have begun for the first trial of burning the waste of Union Carbide factory in Pithampur's waste disposal unit." As per the HC order, 10 tonnes of the waste will be burnt in the first phase of this test.

According to the state government, the waste includes soil from the now-shut Bhopal factory, reactor residue, Sevin (pesticide) residue, naphthal residue and "semi-processed" residue. The State Pollution Control Board said that the effect of Sevin and naphthal in this waste has become "almost negligible".

Earlier, officials transported 337 tonnes of waste from the defunct factory to a facility in Pithampur, about 250 km away, on 2 January. *—PTI*

US eases visa process for Indian student's parents

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The US has granted an interview for an emergency visa for the family of the injured Indian student in the US. Neelam Shinde from Maharashtra's Satara was critically injured in a road accident on 14 February in California and has since been in a coma at a hospital.

Shinde reportedly suffered severe injuries to her head, hand and chest after she was hit from behind by a four-wheeler. Her family had sought an urgent visa to be by her side.

Earlier, the Ministry of External Affairs had reached out to the US government. Sources said that travel permits in such situations are usually awarded quickly, and it was unclear what led to the delay in this situation.

NCP leader Supriya Sule flagged the case on Wednesday.

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

"Student Neelam Shinde has met with an accident in the USA and is hospitalised in a local hospital," she said on X. "Her father, Tanaji Shinde, from Satara, Maharashtra, India, urgently needs to visit his daughter due to a medical emergency. Tanaji Shinde has applied for an urgent visa to the USA and requires assistance," Sule added. *—PTI / Agencies*

Nepalese student death: Panel grills more KIIT officials

BHUBANESWAR, 27 FEB

More than five senior KIIT officials appeared before the Odisha government's high-level committee probing the death allegedly by suicide of a 20-year-old Nepalese BTech student Prakriti Lamsal.

The Higher Education department summoned the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology's (KIIT) chief proctor PK Patnaik, director Sanhita Mishra, Internal Committee chief Ipsita Satpathy, assistant director Smarika Pati and a few others to appear before the panel.

The committee inquired whether the student had made any complaint of harassment before the private varsity's International Relations Office (IRO) as alleged by other Nepalese students. *—PTI*

SPRING BLOOMS

A gardener waters the plants in a Bengaluru park amid scorching heat. Bengaluru, traditionally known for its year-round pleasant climate, is now facing an unexpected spike in temperatures, setting new records. Over the past year, Bengaluru's temperature has risen by 2.7 degrees Celsius in February. On 27 February, the City's temperature soared to 33 degrees Celsius.
PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Freedom dips globally, but bright spots in Asia

Jammu and Kashmir held its first election since the government led by Narendra Modi revoked the region's special status in 2019
PHOTO: PTI

Freedom declined across the world in 2024 — for the 19th year in a row — fueled by armed conflicts, political violence and an unprecedented year of elections, democracy watchdog Freedom House said in its annual report on Wednesday.

But amid the overall decline, South Asia led a series of bright spots.

The report's co-author Yana Gorokhovskaia said 2024 was especially volatile due to the unprecedented number of elections held around the globe.

"The big picture is that this was another year of the same trajectory of a global decline in freedom but because of all the elections, it was more dynamic than previous years," she said.

Gains recorded in Bhutan, Senegal and Syria

The research group elevated the status of two countries to "free."

The first was Senegal, where the opposition triumphed despite the outgoing president's attempts to delay elections, along with the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, which held elections that helped consolidate a long reform process of shifting power from the monarchy to the citizens.

Bhutan is now the only South Asian country with the "free" status. However, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka also saw the largest increase in freedom score. Bangladesh saw its iron-fisted leader Sheikh Hasina flee after a revolt. In Sri Lanka, Anura Kumara Dissanayake was elected president on an anti-corruption agenda, defeating two long-dominant parties.

Syria also saw gains in liberties and freedom immediately after rebel forces toppled the regime of Bashar Assad. Despite the gain, Syria's overall score was one of the worst in the index. Like Bangladesh, Syria too has a tough road ahead to establish free and fair elections and only time will show the real gains in political representation, the report said.

Jordan emerged as another bright spot in the Middle East with its status elevated from "not free" to "partly free," owing to reforms that allowed more competitive elections.

The only country with a perfect 100 score was Finland, with Sweden, Norway and New Zealand right behind at 99.

Kashmir bounces back

Kashmir saw the largest increase of score in the index. The region held its first election since the government led by Narendra Modi revoked Kashmir's special status in 2019.

However, India as a whole saw a decline in freedom as the government made efforts to gain power over appointments in the judiciary. Freedom House previously downgraded India from "free" to "partly free" in 2021.

Political rights largely "depend on institutions. And those are easy to destroy but very hard to build up," Gorokhovskaia said.

- Bhutan is now the only South Asian country with the "free" status. However, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka also saw the largest increase in freedom score. Bangladesh saw its iron-fisted leader Sheikh Hasina flee after a revolt. In Sri Lanka, Anura Kumara Dissanayake was elected president on an anti-corruption agenda, defeating two long-dominant parties. The only country with a perfect 100 score was Finland.

Tanzania, Thailand among downgraded countries

At the other end of the stick, four countries — Kuwait, Niger, Tanzania and Thailand — were downgraded from "partly free" to "not free." Thailand in 2024 witnessed a court disband a party that won most votes in the election and then dismiss the prime minister from the second-placing party.

Niger came under the complete grip of the military after a coup in 2023 ousted the elected president, and Tanzania saw a crackdown on protesters.

Kuwait, Tunisia, El Salvador and Haiti saw the largest decline in freedom in 2024 while Turkmenistan, South Sudan, Sudan, North Korea remained some of nations with the lowest overall scores. Kuwait saw its parliament disbanded after elections while Haiti's capital city has been largely under the grip of gang violence.
—DW News

SALAR سالار

Inflation, global ties drive gold price to record high

The gold price has surged to a new all-time high above USD 2,900 an ounce this month.

It has risen by 12 per cent since the start of the year and clearly outperformed US and Australian stock markets. The US stock index S&P500 is up 4 per cent and the ASX 200 has gained just 2 per cent in that time.

That follows an extraordinary run in 2024, when the precious metal surged 27 per cent, the biggest rise in 14 years.

The drivers behind this surge include heightened uncertainty and fear of inflation that has been stoked by US President Donald Trump's threats of tariffs, together with increased demand from central banks.

What explains gold's recent rally?

There are many factors at play.

The supply of gold through gold mine production and recycling is relatively constant over time. But the demand is more variable, and consists of four major components: jewellery, technology, investment and central banks.

In 2024, jewellery accounted for about 50 per cent of total demand, technology or industrial demand was 5 per cent, investment demand was 25 per cent and central bank demand was 20 per cent.

Investment demand refers to investors who buy gold as an asset. Central banks generally buy gold to diversify their reserve holdings.

As all four demand components vary over time (some more than others), gold price movements are sometimes driven by jewellery demand, sometimes by investor demand, and sometimes – as has happened recently – by central bank demand.

What adds to the difficulty is that both the gold supply and gold demand are global. The supply comes from gold mines across the globe, from emerging countries in Africa and industrial countries such as Australia and Canada.

The same is true for demand. While China and India dominate jewellery demand, the demand comes from many countries, as does investment demand. Central bank demand stems from large and small central banks around the world.

Why is there demand for gold?

One key reason for the popularity of gold is that it is considered to be a store of value. This means gold rises with inflation and maintains its value in the long run.

In other words, an ounce of gold buys the same basket of goods (or more) today than 20 years ago. This is not the case for money (or fiat currency) such as the US or Australian dollars.

Due to inflation, the value of money is not constant but depreciates over time. Because gold holds its value, it is also called an inflation hedge.

While the store of value property holds in the long run, there is another important property that is more short-lived and particularly relevant during crisis periods.

Gold is seen as a safe haven in troubled times

The safe haven property of gold means gold prices increase when investors seek shelter in response to a shock or crisis. For example, investors bought gold in reaction to the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks, the start of the global financial crisis in 2008, and the outbreak of Covid in 2020. The safe haven effect of gold is generally short-lived, often resulting in falling gold prices after about 15 days. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and the subsequent sanctions on Russia – especially the freeze of Russia's foreign government bond holdings abroad – has highlighted the risk to governments of losing access to foreign currency holdings.

It appears some governments or central banks reacted to this with increased gold purchases. This led to a record high of 1,082 tonnes of central bank gold purchases in 2022.

Year 2023 saw the second-highest annual purchase in history at 1,051 tonnes, followed by 1,041 tonnes in 2024.

The potential reaction of central banks to the Russian invasion of Ukraine is akin to investors seeking a safe haven, but is a rather new phenomenon for central banks.

There is an additional, secondary, effect of such central bank purchases and rebalancing from US dollars to gold.

Selling US dollars for gold implies a weakening US dollar, which increases the price of gold. (If the US dollar weakens, you need more US dollars to buy gold.) The inverse relationship between gold prices and currencies also makes gold a currency hedge.

That means gold can protect investors from potential losses due to fluctuating exchange rates.

This effect is particularly strong for rather volatile currencies such as the Australian dollar.

In contrast to the shock caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the more recent increase in gold prices is harder to associate with a single shock.

Broader economic worries

The election of Trump has not only increased the risk of higher inflation due to tariffs and a trade war, it has also increased geopolitical risk as the US government reassesses its alliances with other countries. *—PTI*

Due to inflation, the value of money is not constant but depreciates over time. Because gold holds its value, it is also called an inflation hedge
PHOTO: PTI

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Netizens see red after Trump's bizzare AI video on rebuilt Gaza

US President Donald Trump sparked controversy by posting an AI-generated video on his Truth Social account, showing a fictional land called "Trump Gaza", complete with a golden statue of him, money raining from the sky and bearded belly dancers., CNN reported.

As per the CNN report, the video, which features a golden statue of Trump, a hummus-eating, dancing Elon Musk, and American and Israeli leaders relaxing on a beach, promotes his proposal to expel 2.1 million Palestinians and transform Gaza into a "Riviera" owned by the US.

"No more tunnels, no more fear," a voice sings over a dance beat. "Trump Gaza is finally here!"

According to CNN, Trump has proposed expelling 2.1 million Palestinians from Gaza and turning the enclave into a "Riviera" that would be owned by the US. The West Bank-based Palestinian Authority has condemned the proposal, calling it a "serious violation of international law."

PA Foreign Minister Varsen Aghabekian Shaheen earlier this month said: "We have tried displacement before, and it will not happen again," referring to the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians displaced during the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, which led to the creation of Israel.

The video begins with barefoot Palestinian children walking through the rubble of Gaza. A title card asks, "What's next?" They are then shown approaching a futuristic skyline along Gaza's coast, CNN report said.

"Donald's coming to set you free," a voice sings. "Trump Gaza shining bright. Golden future, a brand-new light. Feast and dance. The deed is done."

The video includes bearded and bikini-clad belly dancers, a child holding a golden balloon shaped like Trump's head, and Elon Musk dancing on a beach under a shower of US dollars.

It ends with Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sipping drinks on a beach.

In a statement, Gaza's Hamas-run Government Media Office denounced the video as "disgraceful," CNN reported.

"This video and its degrading content reflect the deeply rooted racist colonial mindset that seeks to distort reality and justify the occupation's crimes," CNN quoted Gaza Director-General Ismail Al-Thawabtah as saying.

In the video, Donald Trump and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu are seen sipping drinks on a beach. a golden statue of Trump, Israeli leaders relaxing on a beach and bearded and bikini-clad belly dancers
PHOTO: SCREENGRABS

"By portraying Gaza as if it were a land without a people, this desperate attempt aims to legitimise the ongoing ethnic cleansing carried out by the Israeli occupation with clear American support," the Gaza Director-General said.

Arab leaders met in Riyadh on Friday for the first time to discuss a response to Trump's plan. They are set to meet again in Cairo on 4 March and may present their position to Trump at a later date, according to CNN.

One Truth Social user wrote: "I could not be a bigger supporter of President Trump but this particular video is in very poor taste. Very poor taste, indeed!" Another wrote: "I hate this. I love our president, but this is horrible."

"I voted for Donald Trump. I did NOT vote for this. Neither did anyone else I know. The lack of humanity, decency, respect has made me regret my vote," one social media user said.

Another user added, "I can't believe that this is the US President account. Where is the respect" and the seriousness?

The video might have gone down particularly badly with Trump's Christian supporters, with several comments referencing the idolatry of the golden statue, and others lamenting a scene showing Trump in a nightclub alone with a woman dressed as a bellydancer as a crowd looks on.

"Only one deserves the glory and the honor, Mr President," wrote another user. "The statue is a symbol of the antichrist, please humble yourself to God. Jesus is king and only Him." Other users described the video as "sick" and "filth".

One X (formerly Twitter) user said, "Every hour there is a new bottom to reach for Trump. It's disgusting, evil and gross."

Nebraska State Senator Megan Hunt, in two extremely well-worded tweets, said, "Trump's proposition for the US to seize control of the Gaza Strip, forcibly displace Palestinian residents, and redevelop the area into a luxury destination is a reckless affront to international law, human rights and the foundational principles of justice and sovereignty."

An X user called the video a "deranged AI snuff film glorifying the genocide in Palestine with the US stealing Gaza and colonising it with Trump statues and hotels." *—Agencies*

PHOTO: X

Trump to stop Venezuela's oil export to US

CARACAS, 27 FEB

A permit issued by the US allowing energy giant Chevron Corp. to pump and export Venezuelan oil will be terminated this week, President Donald Trump announced on Wednesday, ending what became a financial lifeline for the South American country. Trump's announcement in his Truth Social network accused the Nicolás Maduro government of not meeting democratic conditions in July presidential election as well as of not moving fast on taking back to Venezuela immigrants set for deportation. "We are reversing the concessions that Crooked Joe Biden gave to Nicolás Maduro, of Venezuela, on the oil transaction agreement," Trump wrote. The post did not specifically mention Chevron or the permit, formally known as a general license. *—PTI*

Taiwan condemns China for shooting drills off its coast

TAIPEI, 27 FEB

Taiwan on Thursday condemned China's military exercises after Beijing designated an area to conduct shooting drills off the self-governed island's southwest coast. China considers the island a renegade province to be taken by force if necessary and in recent years has increased military activity around Taiwan's waters and airspace. "China is the biggest troublemaker for regional peace and stability, and the sole and greatest threat to peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and the Indo-Pacific region," Taiwan's foreign ministry said in its statement. The defence ministry said in a 24-hour period it detected 45 aircraft, 14 navy vessels and one ship from the Chinese military operating around Taiwan, of which 34 had crossed into its waters and airspace. *—PTI*

'Warning' strike stalls flights at Munich Airport

BERLIN, 27 FEB

A two-day strike by workers at Munich Airport, Germany's second-biggest, started on Thursday and resulted in most flights being cancelled. The airport operator said airlines cancelled about 80 per cent of flights and further cancellations were not ruled out. The workers' union called the "warning strike", a tactic often used in German pay negotiations, on Monday as it seeks to step up pressure in ongoing talks with the federal government and municipal authorities on wages and working conditions for public-sector employees. The industrial action is set to end at midnight on Friday. Public sector workers, including some workers at Hamburg Airport, also walked off the job in various other locations and services in Germany. *—PTI*

Midnight fire in Manila apartment kills eight in sleep

MANILA, 27 FEB

Eight people were killed in a night-time fire in the Philippine capital region that gutted a three-story residential building early on Thursday in less than an hour, officials said. The fire, which also injured at least one resident, broke out after midnight in the building, which was made of wood, as people slept in San Isidro Galas village in suburban Quezon city, officials said. An investigation was underway to determine the cause of the fire. Two of the dead were found on the ground floor and six others were recovered on the second floor, where the fire apparently started, senior fire officer Rolando Valena said, citing witnesses. The blaze happened as Philippines was set to observe fire-prevention month in March. *—PTI*

TRUMP THREATENS 25% TARIFFS ON EU

Trump says the bloc was formed to harm US

President Donald Trump speaks during a Cabinet meeting at the White House in Washington PHOTO: PTI

WASHINGTON DC, 27 FEB

United States President Donald Trump has said he will impose a 25 percent tariff on imports from the European Union (EU). Further attacking EU, he said the bloc was created to "screw" his country.

Trump said a decision on tariffs had been made and would be announced "very soon".

"It'll be 25 percent, generally speaking," Trump told reporters. "And that'll be on cars and all other things."

Trump claimed that the 27-member union does not accept US cars and farm products while the US takes "everything from them".

The EU currently imposes a 10 percent tariff on US vehicle imports, which is four times the US tariff on European passenger car imports. The US also imposes a 25 percent tariff on imported pick-up trucks.

"Look, let's be honest, the European Union was formed in order to screw the United States," Trump said. "That's the purpose of it, and they've done a good job of it. But now I'm president."

Trump's comments drew a swift response from the European Commission, the bloc's executive arm, which said the world's largest single market area had been "a boon" for the US.

"The EU will react firmly and immediately against unjustified barriers to free and fair trade, including when tariffs are used to challenge legal and non-discriminatory policies," a spokesperson said in a statement.

"The EU will always protect European businesses, workers and consumers from unjustified tariffs."

Other observers in Europe offered more pointed responses to Trump's claims.

"Trumps hates the EU," Gérard Araud, a former French ambassador to the US, said on X. "He doesn't know exactly what it is but he hates it." *—Agencies*

US SC STALLS ORDER TO UNFREEZE FOREIGN AID

The US Supreme Court on Wednesday temporarily blocked a judge's order giving the Trump administration a midnight deadline to release billions of dollars in US foreign aid. Chief Justice John Roberts said the order will remain on hold until the high court has a chance to weigh in more fully. *—PTI*

Trump admin to scrap 90% of USAID's foreign contracts

WASHINGTON, 27 FEB

The Trump administration said it is eliminating more than 90 per cent of the US Agency for International Development's foreign aid contracts and USD 60B in overall US assistance around the world, putting numbers on its plans to eliminate the majority of US development and humanitarian help abroad. The cuts would leave few surviving USAID projects for advocates to try to save in court battles.

The administration outlined its plans in both an internal memo obtained by The AP and filings in one of those federal lawsuits on Wednesday.

Wednesday's disclosures also reveal the scale of the administration's retreat from US aid and development assistance overseas, and from decades of US policy that foreign aid helps US interests by stabilising other countries and economies and building alliances.

The memo said changes are planned in how USAID and the State Department deliver foreign aid, it said, "to use taxpayer dollars wisely to advance American interests." *—PTI*

Tates, accused of rape, trafficking, leave Romania

BUCHAREST, 27 FEB

Influencer brothers Andrew and Tristan Tate have left Romania for the US after a travel ban on them was lifted, an official said Thursday.

The brothers are charged with human trafficking and forming a criminal gang to sexually exploit women.

It is not clear under what conditions the Tates — who are keen supporters of President Donald Trump and boast millions of online followers — were allowed to leave Romania.

An official at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to discuss the case, said the decision was at the discretion of prosecutors.

The brothers' departure came after Romania's Foreign Minister Emil Hurezeanu said this month that a US official under the current Trump administration had expressed interest in the brothers' legal case in Romania at the Munich Security Conference. The minister insisted it didn't amount to pressure.

Andrew Tate and Donald Trump Jr. have been friends since 2016. *—Agencies*

END OF PHASE 1

Palestinian prisoners released from an Israeli prison react as they arrive in the Gaza Strip PHOTO: PTI

Palestinians released by Israel show signs of torture, starvation

KHAN YOUNIS, 27 FEB

Hundreds of Palestinians held in Israeli jails released in Gaza as part of the ceasefire agreement once again showed signs of emaciation and abuse.

More than 600 Palestinians were released on Thursday, shortly after Israel said Hamas handed over coffins containing the bodies of four captives. Israel has delayed the release of two Palestinian women and 44 children.

It was the final scheduled swap in the first phase of the ceasefire deal between Hamas and Israel.

Several Palestinians were transported in ambulances to the European Hospital in Khan Younis in southern Gaza due to the severity of their injuries. Many Palestinians were also sent to Egypt and the occupied West Bank.

Meanwhile, Hamas said it was ready to negotiate the next phase of the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.

It was the final such exchange the two sides agreed to as part of a truce that's set to end this weekend. Negotiations over a second phase, in which Hamas would release dozens of remaining hostages in exchange for more prisoners and a lasting ceasefire, have not yet begun.

Israeli group Hostages and Missing Families Forum, representing families of hostages held by Hamas, said the remains of all four hostages returned early on Thursday have been identified as those of Ohad Yahalomi, Itzhak Elgarat, Shlomo Mantzur and Tsachi Idan. *—Agencies*

Protesters attack Barnard College staffer

Pro-Palestinian protesters wearing kaffiyeh scarves and masks pushed their way into Barnard College's Milbank Hall, which houses the offices of the dean, and assaulted a school employee, according to the school.

The protesters later left Milbank Hall in the night "without further incident," Barnard President Laura Rosenbury said in a statement.

The demonstrators demanded amnesty for all students disciplined for pro-Palestine action; a meeting with Rosenbury and Dean Leslie Grinage; and reversal of the expulsion of two students, according to the group. *—PTI*

NIS: North Korea sent more troops to Russia

SEOUL, 27 FEB

North Korea appears to have deployed additional troops to support Russia's war against Ukraine, South Korea's spy agency National Intelligence Service (NIS) said on Thursday.

The NIS said in a press note that the number of recently deployed troops is being assessed, South Korean news agency Yonhap reported.

The assessment follows a news report that between 1,000 and 3,000 North Korean troops were newly transported to Kursk via Russian cargo ships and military planes between January and February this year in the second round of such troop deployment, the Yonhap reported.

Seoul's spy agency had earlier assessed that North Korean troops deployed to Russia were not fighting in the Kursk region since January, likely due to heavy casualties. The NIS estimated that about 300 were killed and some 2,700 others were injured.

In the beginning of this month Colonel Oleksandr, a spokesperson for the Ukrainian military's Special Operations Forces, told CNN that North Korean troops have not been seen on the battlefront for the past three weeks.

Reports say 12,000 troopers have been sent to assist Russia since the invasion began PHOTO: X

"The presence of DPRK troops has not been observed for about three weeks, and they were probably forced to withdraw after suffering heavy losses," Oleksandr Kindratenko was cited as telling CNN. *—ANI*

Austria set to form govt without Far-Right party

VIENNA, 27 FEB

Three parties announced Thursday that they have reached a deal to form a new centrist Austrian government, five months after an election was won by a Far-Right party that later failed in an attempt to form an administration.

A statement from the conservative Austrian People's Party, the centre-left Social Democrats and the liberal Neos said they agreed on a programme for a coalition after the longest post-election hiatus in post-World War II Austria. The country's politicians broke a 63-year record of 129 days to form a new government.

New People's Party leader Christian Stocker is expected to become chancellor. The parties planned to present their programme later on Thursday.

This is the second attempt by the three mainstream parties to form a new government without the far-right and anti-immigration Freedom Party, which emerged for the first time as the strongest political force. *—PTI*

B'desh student group to enter politics

DHAKA, 27 FEB

The student group in Bangladesh that led the uprising to oust former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August last year will launch a new political party on Friday to "fulfill the aspiration of new Bangladesh," organisers of the group have said.

Nahid Islam, one of the key leaders of the group, resigned from Muhammad Yunus's interim government to lead the new political party that will start its journey from a "grand rally" in the capital, Dhaka, they said.

Samanta Shermeen, spokesperson of Jatio Nagorik Committee, a platform of the student group said, "After the July 2024 uprising, new hopes and aspirations have been born in Bangladesh. In view of those hopes and aspirations, the students have taken the initiative to form a new political party." *—ANI*

After the July 2024 uprising, new hopes and aspirations have been born in Bangladesh, says Samanta Shermeen, spokesperson of Jatio Nagorik Committee

Jeff Bezos overhauls WaPo opinion page

NEW YORK, 27 FEB

Washington Post owner Jeff Bezos has announced a major shift in the newspaper's opinion section, stating that it will now focus on defending "two pillars: personal liberties and free markets". Bezos shared the news on X on Wednesday, saying that viewpoints opposing these principles would be left for others to publish.

Bezos wrote: "I'm writing to let you know about a change coming to our opinion pages. We are going to be writing every day in support and defense of two pillars: personal liberties and free markets. We'll cover other topics too of course, but viewpoints opposing those pillars will be left to be published by others."

"There was a time when a newspaper, especially one that was a local monopoly, might have seen it as a service to bring to the reader's doorstep every morning a broad-based opinion section that sought to cover all views. Today, the internet does that job," he added.

The move marks a significant ideological shift for the Washington Post's opinion pages. *—Agencies*

MYSTERIOUS CELEB DEATHS

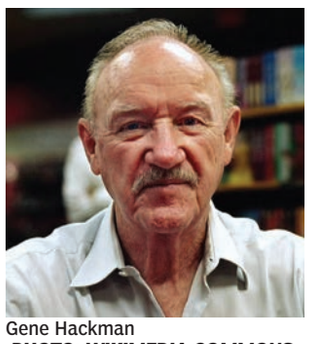
Bodies of Gene Hackman, wife found in New Mexico apartment

SANTA FE, 27 FEB

Oscar-winning actor Gene Hackman and his wife were found dead in their New Mexico home on Wednesday, authorities said.

Foul play is not suspected; however, authorities did not release any details of the circumstances of their deaths and said an investigation is ongoing.

Santa Fe County Sheriff's Office spokesperson Denise Avila said deputies responded to a request to do a welfare check at the home on Wednesday around 1.45pm local time and found Hackman, his wife Betsy Arakawa and a dog dead.



Gene Hackman PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Hackman, 95, was a five-time Oscar nominee who starred in many films and one of the most respected performers. His two Oscar wins, for 'The French Connection' and 'Unforgiven', were spaced out 21 years apart.

News of his death comes just four days before this year's Academy Awards ceremony.

Hackman was a frequent and versatile presence on screen from the 1960s until his retirement. His dozens of films included the Academy Award favourites 'The French Connection' and 'Unforgiven', a breakout performance in 'Bonnie and Clyde', a classic bit of farce in 'Young Frankenstein', a turn as the comic book villain Lex Luthor in 'Superman' and the title character in Wes Anderson's 2001 'The Royal Tenenbaums'. *—PTI*

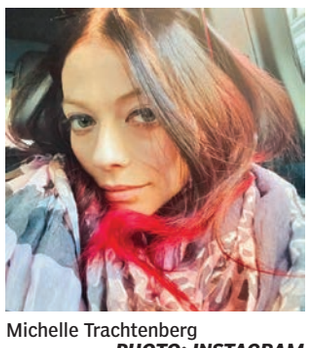
Michelle Trachtenberg of 'Gossip Girl' fame found dead at home

NEW YORK, 27 FEB

'Gossip Girl' and 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer' star Michelle Trachtenberg was found dead in her New York City apartment Wednesday morning, according to The Hollywood Reporter. She was 39.

THR cited the New York Post as the source of the news of Trachtenberg's passing. The Post, citing sources, reported that Trachtenberg recently had undergone a liver transplant and died of natural causes.

THR confirmed the actor's death with her representatives. "It is with great sadness to confirm that Michelle Trachtenberg has passed away. The family requests privacy for their loss."



Michelle Trachtenberg PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

ABC News reported that the actor recently underwent a liver transplant, and was perhaps experiencing complications. Trachtenberg got into acting early, with her first screen credit coming in 1993 with a guest spot on Melissa Joan Hart's Nickelodeon series 'Clarissa Explains it All'.

After landing a recurring role on Nickelodeon's 'The Adventures of Pete & Pete' from 1994-1996, Trachtenberg played her first lead role as the title character in the 1996 family comedy 'Harriet the Spy' opposite Rosie O'Donnell. Trachtenberg's last screen credit was for the Max reboot of 'Gossip Girl', where she made a pair of guest appearances in 2022 and 2023. *—Agencies*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Rupee falls 2P to close at 87.21 against USD

MUMBAI, 27 FEB

Rupee depreciated 2 paise to close at 87.21 (provisional) against US dollar as a muted trend in domestic markets and persistent foreign fund outflows weighed on investor sentiments. Forex traders said the latest tariff announcements from the US have sent shockwaves through global markets, strengthening the dollar. Moreover, month-end dollar demand also boosted the American currency. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 87.26 and touched the high of 87.12 against the greenback during intraday. It also touched the low of 87.41 before ending the session at 87.21 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a loss of 2 paise from its previous close. On Tuesday, the rupee fell sharply by 47 paise to settle at 87.19 against the US dollar.—*PTI*

Gold tumbles Rs 1,150 to Rs 88,200 per 10g

NEW DELHI 27 FEB

Gold prices tumbled by Rs 1,150 to Rs 88,200 per 10g in the national capital on Thursday, tracking a bearish trend in global markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity also slumped by Rs 1,150 to Rs 87,800 per 10g from the previous close of Rs 88,950 per 10g. Silver prices tanked by Rs 1,000 to Rs 98,500 per kg from the last close of Rs 99,500 per kg. Bullion markets were closed on Wednesday for Mahashivratri. Meanwhile, in futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold contracts for April delivery declined Rs 554 to Rs 85,320 per 10g. Silver futures in the Asian market hours also quoted 0.34 per cent lower at USD 32.47 per ounce. —*PTI*

India's private consumption at USD 2.1 trillion

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

India's private consumption has almost doubled to USD 2.1 trillion in 2024 from USD 1 trillion in 2013, growing at 7.2 per cent CAGR, faster than the US, China and Germany, according to a report. On course to become the world's third-largest consumer market by 2026, India is well-positioned to reap the benefits of a demographic dividend, said the report titled 'India's changing discretionary spending: Key insights for brands' launched by Deloitte India with Retailers Association of India on Thursday. By 2030, the report said, "The number of Indians earning over USD 10,000 annually is expected to nearly triple, increasing from 60 million in 2024 to 165 million." —*PTI*

Glenmark launches Epinephrine injection in US

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Glenmark Pharmaceuticals on Thursday said it has launched the generic version of Epinephrine injection multiple-dose vial in the US, which is eligible for 180 days of competitive generic therapy (CGT) exclusivity. Glenmark Pharmaceuticals Inc, USA, an arm of the company, launched the Epinephrine Injection of strength 10mg/10 mL (1mg/mL) multiple-dose vial, Glenmark Pharmaceuticals said. The company's Glenmark's Epinephrine injection USP, 10 mg/10 mL (1 mg/mL) multiple-dose vial is bioequivalent and therapeutically equivalent to the reference-listed drug of BPI Labs, LLC, it added. The injection is used to increase mean arterial blood pressure in adult patients with hypotension associated with septic shock and also for emergency treatment of allergic reactions. —*PTI*

Instagram 'error' floods feed with violent reels

Meta apologises after reels show dead bodies, graphic injuries

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

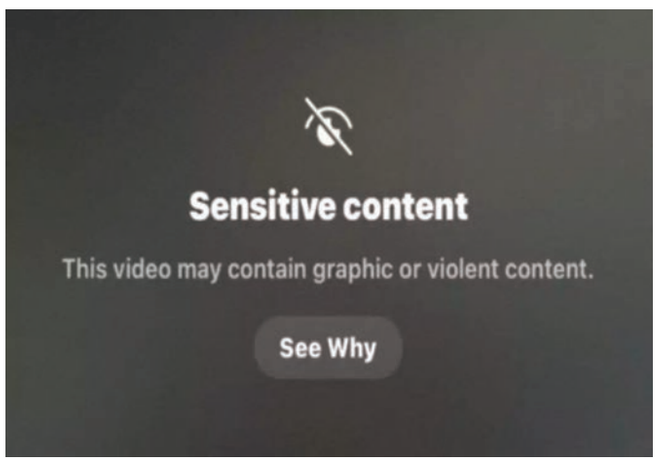
Meta apologised on Thursday and said it had fixed an "error" that resulted in Instagram users reporting a flood of violent and graphic content recommended on their personal Reels page.

"We have fixed an error that caused some users to see content in their Instagram Reels feed that should not have been recommended," a Meta spokesperson said.

The statement comes after several Instagram users took to X to complain that their feeds are flooded with violent and not safe for work content (NSFW) content. Even users with Sensitive Content Control enabled are reporting seeing disturbing videos, including gory content, in their feeds.

According to Meta policy, the company works to protect users from disturbing imagery and removes content that is particularly violent or graphic.

"Anyone else noticing this on Instagram? In the past few hours, my IG Reels feed has suddenly started showing violent or disturbing videos out of nowhere. feels random. Is anyone else experiencing this? Or is it just me? Wondering if it's a glitch or some weird algorithm change," one user asked.



According to Vocal Media, Instagram's latest update may have mistakenly prioritised certain objectionable posts *PHOTO: UNSPLASH*

According to Vocal Media, Instagram's latest update may have mistakenly prioritised certain objectionable posts, leading to the surge in sensitive and violent content.

The reels appeared to show dead bodies, graphic injuries and violent assaults.

According to Meta's website, it uses internal technology and a team of more than 15,000 reviewers to help detect disturbing imagery.

The technology, which includes artificial intelligence and machine learning tools, helps prioritize posts and remove "the vast majority of violating content" before users even report it, the website states.

Furthermore, Meta works to avoid recommending content on its platforms that may be "low-quality, objectionable, sensitive or inappropriate for younger viewers," it adds.

The error with Instagram Reels, however, comes after Meta announced plans to update its moderation policies to better promote free expression.

In a statement published on 7 January, the company said that it would change the way it enforces some of its content rules in order to reduce mistakes that had led to users being censored.

Meta said this included shifting its automated systems from scanning for "all policy violations" to a focus on "illegal and high-severity violations, like terrorism, child sexual exploitation, drugs, fraud and scams." For less severe policy violations, the company said it would rely on users to report issues before taking action. —*Agencies*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Talent gap looms in hiring: LinkedIn

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Generative AI has rapidly transitioned from a mere buzzword to a critical business imperative for Indian organisations, with most business leaders in India prioritising AI adoption, says a report.

However, a significant challenge remains: finding professionals with the right AI and related skills to unlock the technology's full potential, a report by LinkedIn revealed.

"Around 54 per cent of HR professionals in India report that only half, or fewer, of the job applications they receive meet required qualifications. Finding candidates with the right technical (61 per cent) and soft skills (57 per cent) remains their biggest hiring challenge. The hardest-to-find skills include technical/IT skills such as software development, engineering (44 per cent), AI skills (34 per cent) and soft skills like communication and problem-solving (33 per cent)," the report said.

This scarcity of qualified candidates is forcing companies to become increasingly selective in their hiring processes.

According to the report, companies are exercising 'selective hiring' in 2025 with more than half of HR professionals in India saying they would only consider reaching out to (55 per cent) and hiring (54 per cent) of candidates who meet 80 per cent or more of job qualifications.

India is LinkedIn's second largest market in terms of membership, growing more than 20 per cent year-on-year. LinkedIn has over 150 million members in India. —*PTI*

Ola Electric axes regional warehouses

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Ola Electric has eliminated its regional warehouses across India, and will now leverage its 4,000 retail stores nationwide for maintaining vehicle inventory, spare parts, accessories, and last-mile deliveries.

The move is expected to boost margins by almost 10 per cent, besides improving inventory management and faster customer deliveries, sources said.

Ola Electric is redesigning its distribution network and optimising vehicle registration process as India's largest electric two-wheeler maker chalks out roughly Rs 30 crore monthly savings in an accelerated profitability drive. The company has also renegotiated contracts with vehicle registration agency partners to streamline the process and further reduce costs. While this move temporarily affected the company's registration numbers on the VAHAN portal in February, Ola Electric clarified in a stock exchange filing that actual sales remained unaffected during the month. Internal sources indicated that the company is on track to sell over 25,000 units this month, maintaining its leadership in the EV two-wheeler segment. —*PTI*

20-40% salary hikes expected in EV, AI fields: Report

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

As India's job market continues to evolve, employees are now seeking salary hikes of 20-40 per cent, particularly in high-growth sectors such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Electric Vehicles (EV), and engineering, according to a recent report by Adecco India.

This rise in salary expectations reflects the growing demand for specialised skills in these areas, as per the report.

The report highlights a strong hiring demand for niche roles in sectors such as EV, Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG), digital transformation, and cloud computing. —*ANI*

Cable stocks lose ₹33,000 cr after UltraTech's new project

MUMBAI, 27 FEB

- UltraTech intends to invest Rs 1,800 crore ($200 million) in order to build a cables and wire facility in Gujarat's Bharuch.

Shares of five wires and cables companies— Polycab India Ltd., Havells India Ltd, KEI Industries Ltd, Finolex Cables Ltd. and RR Kabel Ltd lost over Rs 33,000 crore ($3.8 billion) in market capitalisation on Thursday after India's largest cement company, UltraTech Cement, announced a foray into the segment.

Shares of Polycab and RR Kabel ended 19 per cent lower each, while those of Havells India closed 6 per cent lower. KEI Industries shares fell 21 per cent, while those of Finolex Cables also ended with losses of 6%.

Polycab lost over Rs 16,000 crore, while KEI Industries' 21 per cent fall has led to a Rs 7,632 crore erosion.

UltraTech intends to invest Rs 1,800 crore ($200 million) in order to build a cables and wire facility in Gujarat's Bharuch. UltraTech's $200 million foray has also resulted in a wipeout of nearly $2 billion of its own market capitalisation, as the stock shed over 5 per cent post the announcement. —*Agencies*

'India needs to ramp up bilateral ties for trade'

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said India needs to ramp up its bilateral relations for trade and investment, as the world is witnessing a churn, and bilateralism seems to be the new catalyst tool.

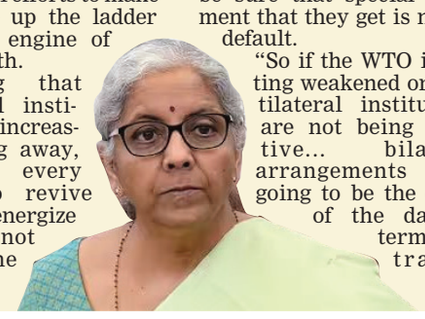
Speaking at BS Manthan, she said these are very interesting yet challenging times and the government is making all efforts to make India move up the ladder and be an engine of global growth.

Observing that multilateral institutions are increasingly fading away, she said, every attempt to revive them and energize them is not having the desired result.

Asserting that global trade is undergoing a complete reset, she said, "the terms and references with which all of us played trade, with some kind of an anchor in the World Trade Organization are no longer available."

There is no Most Favoured Nation (MFN) concept, she said, adding, every country wants to be treated special, and every country wants to be sure that special treatment that they get is not by default.

"So if the WTO is getting weakened or multilateral institutions are not being effective... bilateral arrangements are going to be the order of the day in terms of trade,"



Nvidia rakes in $39B in Q4 results

WASHINGTON, 27 FEB

Nvidia, the California-based technology giant, reported a significant surge in fourth-quarter profit and sales on Wednesday, driven by soaring demand for its new Blackwell chips, which are at the heart of the latest artificial intelligence (AI) systems.

The company's earnings sent its stock higher in after-hours trading, underscoring Nvidia's continued dominance in the AI hardware space.

For the three months ending 26 January, Nvidia posted revenue of $39.3 billion, a 12 per cent increase from the previous quarter and a remarkable 78 per cent jump from the same period a year earlier. For the quarter, GAAP earnings per diluted share was $0.89, up 14 per cent from the previous quarter and up 82 per cent from a year ago. Non-GAAP earnings per diluted share was $0.89, up 10 per cent from the previous quarter and up 71 per cent from a year ago. —*PTI*

Piyush asks firm to stop relying on govt

MUMBAI, 27 FEB

Union Commerce and Industries Minister Piyush Goyal on Thursday asked the industry players to be bold and focus their energies on turning competitive, rather than depending on the government for support.

Speaking at an event organised by the IMC Chamber of Commerce here, Goyal asked till when will the industry depend on the "crutches" of subsidies, high import duties and other similar protectionist measures.

"Till when can we look up to the government (for support)? Or, till when can we win on crutches of subsidies and support, incentives, high import duties, the protectionist mindset, and being very defensive in our engagement with the world?"

"We as a nation will have to decide to get out of this protectionist mindset and weak-kneed thinking", Goyal said, wondering if Michael Porter's seminal work on competitive advantage is relevant only till industry leaders are in business schools. —*PTI*

IKEA TO BEGIN ONLINE SALES IN DELHI THIS WEEK

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Swedish furniture retailer Ikea will begin online sales in Delhi-NCR and nine other markets this week in the run-up to opening full-size physical stores in Gurugram and Noida in next few years.

Besides, Ikea India plans to open small city centres in Delhi-NCR ahead of the stores, which will be catered through a 1.8 lakh sq feet Customer Distribution Centre (CDC) opened at Gurugram.

The nine other markets where Ikea is entering through online sales are Agra, Prayagraj, Amritsar, Chandigarh, Jaipur, Kanpur, Lucknow, Ludhiana, and Varanasi. Ikea is entering Delhi-NCR and North India after six year of operation with stores in Hyderabad, Mumbai and Bengaluru. —*PTI*

AMID TURBULENT GEOPOLITICS

Nifty falls 14% from record peak on FIIs exodus

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Equity benchmark indices are facing massive corrections, with the NSE Nifty declining over 14 per cent from its lifetime high hit in September last year due to several negative triggers like stretched valuations, foreign fund exodus, disappointing quarterly earnings and rising global trade tensions dragging markets lower.

The BSE benchmark Sensex hit its record peak of 85,978.25 on 27 September last year, and the Nifty also reached a lifetime high of 26,277.35 on the same day.

The Nifty tumbled 3,729.8 points or 14.19 per cent from its all-time high level. The BSE bellwether index Sensex is down 11,376.13 points or 13.23 per cent from its record peak.

PHOTO: X

Equity markets came under bear attack from last October onwards after smashing many record high levels.

"A correction of this magnitude is usually triggered by a combination of factors. Investor sentiment was tempered when a number of large corporations reported lower-than-expected Q3 results. Furthermore, the Indian stock market faced a difficult environment due to Trump's tariff threats and worries about India's slowing economic growth, which caused international investors to keep selling," Puneet Singhania, Director of Master Trust Group, said.

"Additionally, weak US economic data and inflation risks, fuelled by President Donald Trump's tariffs, added to market uncertainties."

Singhania further said that foreign institutional investors (FIIs) are continuously selling their stakes in the Indian equity market.

The total foreign fund outflows have gone past Rs 1 lakh crore so far in 2025. —*PTI*

Markets close unchanged on monthly expiry day

MUMBAI, 27 FEB

PHOTO: X

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty closed almost unchanged on Thursday in a volatile trade amid unabated foreign fund outflows and monthly derivatives expiry.

The 30-share BSE Sensex eked out gains of 10.31 points or 0.01 per cent to settle at 74,612.43. During the day, it hit a high of 74,834.09 and a low of 74,520.78, gyrating 313.31 points.

The NSE Nifty slipped 2.50 points or 0.01 per cent to 22,545.05, registering its seventh day of decline. As many as 31 Nifty components declined while 19 closed higher.

Gains from financials and metal shares were offset by losses in capital goods and auto shares.

From the Sensex pack, Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance, Sun Pharma, Zomato, Tata Steel and Nestle were the biggest gainers.

Tata Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Tech Mahindra and State Bank of India were among the major laggards.

The BSE smallcap gauge tumbled 2.09 per cent and midcap index declined 0.97 per cent.

Among BSE sectoral indices, industrials tanked the most 2.47 per cent, followed by realty (2.06 per cent), power (1.80 per cent), capital goods (1.58 per cent), auto (1.57 per cent), consumer discretionary (1.34 per cent) and utilities (1.18 per cent). —*PTI*

Pietersen joins Delhi Capitals as mentor

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Former England captain Kevin Pietersen was on Thursday appointed mentor of Delhi Capitals ahead of the upcoming IPL season. The 44-year-old thus returns to the side he captained in 2014.This marks Pietersen's first coaching assignment in the IPL, where he featured as a player from 2009 to 2016.I'm so excited to come home to Delhi! I have the fondest memories of my time with Delhi. I love the city, I love the fans and I'll do everything I can to support the franchise in our quest for the title in 2025 —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Gary Woodland receives PGA Tour Courage Award

PALM BEACH, 27 FEB

Former U.S. Open champion Gary Woodland was honored Wednesday with the PGA Tour Courage Award as he comes back from brain surgery to remove a lesion that was causing him to have unfounded thoughts that he was dying. Woodland, who won the U.S. Open at Pebble Beach to go along with three other PGA Tour titles, had a hole the size of a baseball removed from his head so doctors could remove the lesion in a September 2023 surgery.He returned last year and continues to make strides toward restoring his game and his life at home with his wife Gabby and his three children.—*PTI*

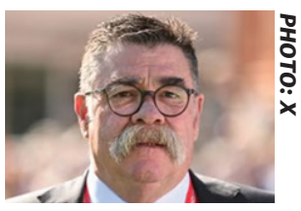


PHOTO: X

David Boon to join Cricket Australia Board

DUBAI, 27 FEB

Former Australia batter David Boon is set to step down from his role as an International Cricket Council (ICC) match referee following the current Champions Trophy to take up a position on Cricket Australia's (CA) board from 28 March. "I'm delighted that David will bring his vast experience as a player and cricket administrator to the CA board," CA chief Mike Baird was quoted as saying by 'cricket.com.au'. "David has continued to gain first-hand insights into international cricket in his role as an ICC match referee and this will be invaluable as we negotiate the game's rapidly changing landscape," he added.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Praggu draws with Navara; Aravindh escapes against Van

PRAGUE, 27 FEB

Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa split points with Czech hero David Navara while compatriot Aravindh Chithambaram escaped with a draw with another local star Nguyen Thai Dai Van in the first round of the Prague Masters. German Vincent Keymer, who was famously part of team D Gukesh's team during the World Championships, scored the first big upset of the tournament taking down top seed Wei Yi of China. American Sam Shankland was the other winner of the day as he defeated Gurel Ediz of Turkey while the game between Quang Leim Le of Vietnam and Anish Giri of Holland ended in a draw. —*PTI*

Aditya leads Kerala against Vidarbha

Kerala fight back after Malewar takes 153 runs

NAGPUR, 27 FEB

Aditya Sarwate's unbeaten 66 anchored Kerala's reply as the visitors reached 131/3 at stumps on the second day of the Ranji Trophy final after restricting hosts Vidarbha to 379 in the first innings on Thursday.

Doughty Kerala fought all day long to keep the game interestingly poised as they trailed by another 248 runs in the first innings, riding on local star Sarwate's fine knock after their bowlers did not allow Vidarbha to post a huge total in the first essay.

Vidarbha had set sights on a total around 450 after reaching 254/4 on the opening day, but Kerala fought back incredibly well to keep the hosts under 400, which featured a career-best 153 from Danish Malewar and Karun Nair's 86.

Kerala, who had ended the opening day's play with the vital dismissal of Karun Nair (86), remained persistent throughout the first session on the second day as their seamers, MD Nidheesh (3/61), Eden Apple Tom (3/102), and NM Basil (2/60), produced a unified show. Basil snuck one through the gap between Malewar's bat and pads for the first breakthrough, ending the No 4 batter's charge at 153 off 285 balls with 15 fours and three sixes. But perhaps the biggest breakthroughs of the day came for Kerala when Eden had Vidarbha's red-hot form batter Yash Rathod caught in the slips for a mere three. Without much pace on the delivery, Eden got the ball to straighten up enough to catch the shoulder of the bat, which landed in the hands of the fielder at the first slip.

Aditya Sarwate celebrates his half-century PHOTO: PTI

Vidarbha skipper Akshay Wadkar's (23) resistance did not last long when his charge against Eden's delivery outside off took an edge, and keeper Mohammed Azharuddeen did the rest. To their credit, Vidarbha's tail consisting of Akshay Karnewar (12), Harsh Dubey (12 not out), and Nachiket Bhute (32) did well to drag them as far as 379.

Vidarbha needed to strike with the new ball, and Darshan Nalkande (2/22) provided two early wickets, cleaning up both the Kerala openers Akshay Chandran (14) and Rohan (0) to reduce Kerala to a precarious 14/2.

Brief scores: Vidarbha 379 in 123.1 overs (Danish Malewar 153, Karun Nair 86; MD Nidheesh 3/61, Eden Apple Tom 3/101, NM Basil 2/60) lead Kerala 131/3 in 39 overs (Aditya Sarwate 66*, Ahammed Imran 37; Darshan Nalkande 2/22) by 248 runs. —*PTI*

Rohit Sharma PHOTO: PTI

AS A LEADER, ROHIT HAS BECOME MATURE: DHAWAN

DUBAI, 27 FEB

Former opener Shikhar Dhawan believes Rohit Sharma has matured as a leader over the years and shares a close bond with his teammates, which augurs well for the Indian team.

Dhawan, who was Rohit's opening partner for a considerable period, said the Mumbai batter is experienced enough to handle the team.

"From 2013 to 2025, 12 years of experience is a lot. Rohit has been through a lot. He knows how to work in a pressure situation, and how to gather the boys.

"As a leader, he has become mature, he knows when to be lenient and when to pull back. It's a fine balance and Rohit's bond with the boys is amazing. We are in a great situation," Dhawan said in a special series titled 'The Shikhar Dhawan Experience' on Star Sports and JioHotstar.

Dhawan also spoke about his 2013 ICC Champions Trophy journey and recollected his nine-year-long opening partnership with Rohit, which also began at the same tournament. —*PTI*

Afghanistan shift focus to Australia after England's victory

LAHORE, 27 FEB

Win over England at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore on Wednesday, Afghanistan head coach Jonathan Trott said that his team's focus will now shift to their next game against Australia on Friday at the same venue.

As far as Afghanistan is concerned, their batting will be spearheaded by swashbuckling opener Ibrahim Zadran, whose 177 against England is now the highest individual score in the Champions Trophy.

Eyeing a semifinal spot, Australia's historic pedigree in cricket's biggest tournaments will count for nothing when they run into an Afghanistan side that is fast cementing its place in the game's top table, in the Champions Trophy.

Basking in the afterglow of their memorable win over England at the Gaddafi Stadium on Wednesday, Afghanistan has a realistic chance of making their second successive semifinals of a global event, less than a year after they enter into the last four stages of the T20 World Cup in the Americas.

On the other hand, a win for Australia will secure their passage to the tournament's semifinals while eliminating Afghanistan with a game to spare.

However, it is easier said than done. For all their firepower in batting, Australia is without their three leading fast bowlers Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins, and Josh Hazlewood. —*PTI*

CT POINTS TABLE

GROUP A	M	W	L	PT
1. NZ	2	2	0	4
2. IND	2	2	0	4
3. BAN	3	0	2	1
4. PAK	3	0	2	1
GROUP B	**M**	**W**	**L**	**PT**
1. SA	2	1	0	3
2. AUS	2	1	0	3
3. ENG	2	0	2	0
4. AFG	2	0	1	2

In-form Mumbai eye revenge against Delhi

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

Former champions Mumbai Indians will look to avenge their first-leg loss and continue the recent winning streak when they take on Delhi Capitals in a top-of-the-table Women's Premier League clash here on Friday.

Only DC managed to upstage MI in the four matches at Vadodara earlier this month, and revenge will be high on the Harmanpreet Kaur-led side's mind when it takes the field on Friday.

Since that loss, MI has been on a three-match winning streak, beating Gujarat Giants by five wickets, Royal Challengers Bengaluru by four wickets, and UP Warriorz by eight wickets respectively.

And come Friday, MI would want to continue the run to keep their place at the top of the league standings.

MI is currently leading the WPL table with six points from four games but is closely followed by DC with six points from five matches.

MI's strength lies in its power-packed batting line.

English batter Nat-Sciver Brunt has been in terrific form for the inaugural champions, leading the run-getters chart with 254 from four matches, including three half-centuries.

Skipper Harmanpreet too is in good touch and has a fifty to her name in four games. Hayley Matthews's return to form augurs well for MI. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Mumbai vs Delhi Match starts at 7.30 pm IST

Hamilton fastest in morning, rain enforces pause

SAKHIR, 27 FEB

Lewis Hamilton was fastest in his new Ferrari on the morning of the second day of Formula 1 preseason testing as rain in the desert affected Thursday's session.

The seven-time champion's best time was nearly four-tenths of a second faster than his former teammate, George Russell of Mercedes. Carlos Sainz, Jr. was third fastest for Williams.

Hamilton's time was also a second faster than the best lap from the first day of testing Wednesday, which was set by Lando Norris for McLaren. Times in testing often don't reflect a driver or car's true pace because of different strategies. Adding to the unseasonably cold conditions, the rare sight of light rain in Bahrain midway through the session was an extra complication for teams trying to learn more about their new cars. —*PTI*

Pak-B'desh match called off

RAWALPINDI, 27 FEB

The Champions Trophy match between hosts Pakistan and Bangladesh here on Thursday was called off without a ball being bowled due to incessant rain.

Hosting an ICC tournament for the first time in 29 years, Pakistan thus ended their disastrous campaign without registering a single victory. Bangladesh, too, concluded their journey without a win and will go back home with plenty to introspect. One point will be shared by both teams.

Pakistan has attracted criticism for their forgettable outing in the tournament, which included a six-wicket defeat at the hands of traditional rivals India in Dubai. —*PTI*

WE'VE PLANNED FOR AUSTRALIA, NOT JUST MAXWELL: SHAHIDI

DUBAI, 27 FEB

The Afghanistan team has chalked out plans for the entire Australian side and is not just focussed on its bete noire Glenn Maxwell, skipper Hashmatullah Shahidi said on the eve of their must-win Champions Trophy match.

Having knocked England out of the tournament with a memorable eight-run win here on Wednesday, Afghanistan is now seeking to get the better of Australia at the same venue on Friday and book a semifinal berth.

PHOTO: PTI

"You think we will come only to play with Maxwell? Do you think it will be like that? We have planned for the entire Australian team, and I know that he (Maxwell) played well in the 2023 World Cup, but that's part of the history," Shahidi said at the pre-match press conference on Thursday.

Chasing 292, Australia was staring at a certain defeat after losing seven wickets with less than 100 on the board, but then, Maxwell played one of the greatest knocks in the history of one-day cricket to steer his side into an unbelievable win, and days later, the Aussies won a record-extending sixth World Cup. —*PTI*

Banthia-Somani storm into B'luru Open SFs

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

India's Siddhant Banthia and Parikshit Somani secured a straight-set win over Nicolas Mejia and Bernard Tomic to reach the doubles semifinals at the Bengaluru Open, an ATP Challenger 125 tournament, here on Thursday.

The unseeded Indian duo dismantled Nicolas and Bernard 7-5, 6-0 to set up a fight with Australia's Blake Bayldon and Mattew Christopher Romios for a place in the title clash.

Earlier, Ramkumar and Saketh Myneni took a step closer to a successful title defence with a 6-3, 6-3 win over Hynek Barton and Eric Vanshelboim. After an even first set, both Banthia-Somani and Mejia-Tomic went toe-to-toe for the upper hand, which the latter nearly seized in game seven. However, after saving a crucial break point, the Indian pair swept through games nine and 11 on their serve, before breaking in game 12 for the lead. —*PTI*

Asia Cup likely to be staged in September

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The Asia Cup, which will serve as a preparatory event for the 2026 T20 World Cup, is likely to be held in September this year at a neutral venue, though the hosting rights are with India.

The last Asia Cup was held in the ODI format ahead of the 2023 50-over World Cup in India.

"The tournament will be held in September. India has the hosting rights, but it will be played in UAE or Sri Lanka," said a source in the Asian Cricket Council.

PHOTO: PTI

The highlight of the event will be the India-Pakistan contest, and if they reach the final, both teams could play each other as many as three times. India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, UAE, Oman, and Hong Kong will be the eight participating teams.

Though BCCI has the hosting rights, it could go for a neutral venue with Pakistan unlikely to travel to India given what transpired in the ongoing Champions Trophy.

India are playing all their Champions Trophy games in Dubai, though the hosts are Pakistan, where Rohit Sharma's team has not travelled due to security concerns.

The next T20 World Cup is in India and Sri Lanka, with the arch-rivals expected to play the marquee game in the island nation.

India is the most successful team in the continental event, capturing as many as eight titles across the two white-ball formats. —*PTI*

PREMIER LEAGUE

Liverpool increases lead, Arsenal drops more points

MANCHESTER, 27 FEB

It feels like a matter of when, not if, Liverpool seals a record-equaling 20th English league title.

The gap at the top of the Premier League was extended to 13 points on Wednesday after a 2-0 victory over Newcastle. Liverpool took full advantage as second-place Arsenal dropped more points in a 0-0 draw with Nottingham Forest. Dominik Szoboszlai scored in the 11th minute and Alexis Mac Allister netted just past the hour mark at Anfield to secure a 20th league win of the season from 28 games.

Manchester City moved back up to fourth after Erling Haaland returned from a knee injury and scored in a 1-0 win at Tottenham. Trailing inside four minutes at Old Trafford after Jaden Philogene's early goal, United bounced back to win 3-2, despite Patrick Dorgu's red card in the 43rd.

Newcastle's Lewis Hall, left, challenges Liverpool's Mohamed Salah PHOTO: X / @LFC

Against a Newcastle team that was without injured star striker Alexander Isak, Liverpool eased to victory at Anfield. Szoboszlai scored for the second time in as many games firing low from inside the box in the 11th.

Newcastle mounted little threat and Mac Allister put the game beyond doubt in the 63rd following Mohamed Salah's assist.

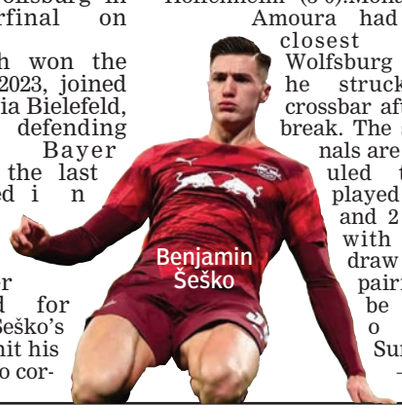
The teams will meet again at Wembley next month in the final of the English League Cup when Liverpool could seal the first leg of a potential treble. Newcastle, meanwhile, is aiming to end a 70-year wait for a major domestic trophy. —*PTI*

Sesko fires Leipzig into German Cup semifinals

LEIPZIG, 27 FEB

Benjamin Sesco's penalty was enough for Leipzig to book the last semifinal spot in the German Cup with a 1-0 win over Wolfsburg in their quarterfinal on Wednesday.

Leipzig, which won the competition in 2023, joined third-tier Arminia Bielefeld, Stuttgart, and defending champion Bayer Leverkusen in the last four. Šeško scored in the 69th minute after Wolfsburg's Kilian Fischer was penalized for handball when Šeško's close-range shot hit his arm. There was no correction from the video referee.



It was the first goal Wolfsburg had conceded in the competition after wins over Koblenz (1-0), Borussia Dortmund (1-0) and Hoffenheim (3-0).Mohammed Amoura had gone closest for Wolfsburg when he struck the crossbar after the break. The semifinals are scheduled to be played on 1 and 2 April, with the draw for the pairings to be made on Sunday. —*PTI*